Men-at-Arms

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Roman Centurions 753–31 BC

The Kingdom and the Age of Consuls

Raffaele D'Amato • Illustrated by Giuseppe Rava

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Raffaele D'Amato • Illustrated by Giuseppe Rava
Series editor Martin Windrow

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THE KINGDOM AND THE AGE OF CONSULS

INTRODUCTION

The history and image of the ancient Roman war machine are inextricably linked with the figure of its most famous class of officer – the *centurio*, marked out by the transverse crest (*crista transversa*) on his helmet, the decorated greaves (*ocreae*) protecting his legs, and the Latin vine-staff (*vitis latina*) in his right hand. These men were the true architects of the victories and of the triumphs of the Roman legions, both by the discipline they instilled in their men – sometimes with extreme brutality – and by the military virtues and exemplary bravery they displayed on campaign and in battle. They created the backbone of professional skills and discipline that made their army the most consistently successful, over the longest period, in history. Although their prestige and importance in ancient times faded later, the officers bearing this rank survived as an institution into the Middle Ages, until the last centuries of the Eastern Roman Empire of Byzantium.

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Romano-Etruscan centurion depicted on a 4th–3rd century BC cinerary urn from Volterra, present location unknown (compare with Plate B4). (Drawing by Andrea Salimbeti, ex-Antonucci)

According to Varro (*DLL*, V,16), the most ancient citizenship of Rome – from perhaps 625 BC – was based on the union of three tribes: the Ramnes, the most ancient, were of Latin origin; the Tities, of Sabine origin; and the Luceres, probably of Etruscan origin. Each of these three tribes was divided into ten politico-administrative communities called *curiae* (from *co-viria*, i.e. 'men together'). In case of war, each *curia* formed something like a levy district, which raised a *decuria* of cavalrymen (ten men) and a *centuria* of infantrymen. Theoretically, this word traces its roots to *centum*, Latin for one hundred, but that connection is now widely disputed. In the Roman infantry, the *centuria* or 'century' was commanded by a selected officer called a *centurio*.

THE AGE OF THE KINGS

Centurions in the armies of the first kings

According to Iohannes Lydus (*De Mag.*, I, 9), who quotes from the now-lost tactical manual of a certain Paternus, it was Romulus – the traditional founder of the city in 753 BC – who appointed 'centurions of the infantry army. There were 3,000 infantrymen armed with shields; he gave to every 100 men a leader, whom the Greeks call *hekatontarches* and the Romans

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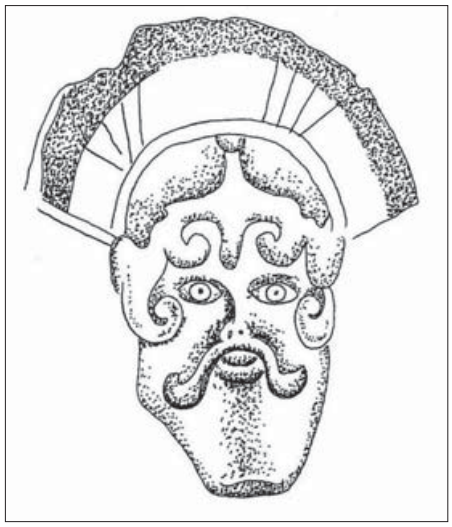
centurio.' Lydus adds that at the time of Romulus there were 30 centurions in the army, and a similar number of *manipuli*, i.e. units corresponding to 100 men and furnished with standards or *signa* (*semeiophoroi*). This assertion at least suggests an ancient belief that centurions had existed since the time of the first Roman kings.

The second mention of centurions in the Roman army of the first Latin kings is in Livy (I, 28), writing about the aftermath of a battle fought – in the first half of the 6th century BC – by Servius Tullius against the Veientes and the Fidenates, when the Romans executed the ruler of Alba Longa, Mettius Fufetius, for treacherously abandoning them on the battlefield. The armed centurions received orders from their king to surround the Alban ruler, who was torn apart between two four-horse chariots. The passage attests not only to the existence of these officers in the primitive Roman military organization, but also to the fact that they were directly under the command of the king.

Centurions in the army of Servius Tullius

According to the Greek historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus, writing in the Augustan period (27 BC–AD 14), it was probably the Etruscan king of Rome, Servius Tullius (r. *c*.579–534 BC), who, when reforming the Roman army in conformity to Etruscan models, promoted the bravest men as commanders of *centuriae*, i.e. centurions (Greek, *lochagoi*). Thus the most famous rank in the Roman army may well have been among the various Etruscan legacies that passed down to the Romans. The 'Servian reforms' developed the *centuriae* from the Roman tribal system. Livy – a contemporary of Dionysius – compares the early legion to the Macedonian phalanx (VIII, 8); he also explains the organization of such legions in terms that appear rather up-to-date for the 6th century BC. Supposedly, Servius formed 80 *centuriae* from Roman citizens fit for military service (free-born, without physical disabilities, and honest), and divided such *centuriae* into two groups: one of *seniores* or men from 45 to 60 years old, and another one of *juniores*, aged from 17 to 45. The *seniores* guarded the city of Rome, while the *juniores* fought in field campaigns. These 80 *centuriae* were collectively called the *Classis Prima* or First Class; the men had to have complete equipment consisting of helmet (*galea*), body armour (*lorica*), round shield (*clipeus*), and greaves (*ocreae*) all made of bronze, and were armed with a spear (*hasta*) and a sword (*gladius*). Two *centuriae* of *fabri* or engineers were also attached to this First Class, to handle the war-machines or artillery (*machinae*).

Extraordinary terracotta mask *antefissa* from an Etruscan temple at Caere (Cerveteri). It shows a kind of masked helmet similar to the original once in the San Marino Archaeological Museum (see page 44), but furnished with a white *crista transversa* edged in red. This is evidence that the transverse crest was already in use from at least the 6th century BC. (Drawing by Andrea Salimbeti, ex-Antonucci)



The *Classis Secunda*, Second Class, was composed of 20 *centuriae* again divided between *juniores* and *seniores*. Their equipment differed from that of the First Class in that they wore no body-armour, and carried not circular bronze shields but the *scutum*, an elongated shield of wood and leather. The Third Class, *Classis Tertia*, similarly had 20 *centuriae*, and the same equipment as the Second Class except for lacking greaves. The Fourth Class, *Classis Quarta*, was likewise divided into 20 *centuriae*, but armed with just a spear and a light javelin (*verutum*). The 20 *centuriae* of the Fifth Class, *Classis Quinta*, were armed only with slings (*fundae*) and throwing-stones (*lapides*); two of the *centuriae* in this class were composed of musicians – hornblowers (*cornicines*) and trumpeters (*tibicines*).

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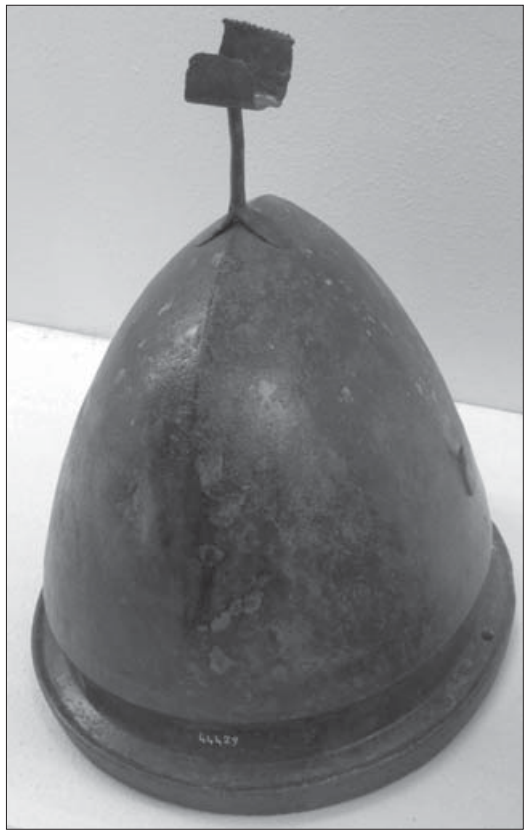
Dionysius (*Rom.*, IV, 16–17) gives a slightly different organization. According to him, the Fifth Class was also armed with javelins (*saynia*), and was placed 'outside the battle-array'. Dionysius also writes that Servius Tullius formed four unarmed *centuriae* (*lochoi*) which followed the armed soldiers. Two of these were composed of armourers (*oplopoioi*), carpenters (*tektonoi*), and 'those men able to prepare everything needed during wartime' (artisans, *cheirotechnai*), and were attached to the Second Class, not to the First as Livy stated; the other two comprised trumpeters (*salpistai*) and hornblowers (*bykanistai*), and were also attached to the Second Class, instead of the Fifth Class as according to Livy. These men were assigned according to their age; one of their *centuriae* followed the *seniores*, the other the *juniores*.

The *centuria* could contain anything from 80 to 100 men, but the latter figure is more probable for the Servian period. According to Dionysius, the commander of each *centuria* was elected by its soldiers, and we may suppose that the soldiers' choice of centurion was primarily based upon prowess in battle.

It is interesting to recall here a further passage from Livy (I, 52, 6) concerning a military organization instituted by Servius' successor, Tarquinius the Proud – Rome's last king, expelled 509 BC – for the new Latin conscripts in the Roman army: 'When they assembled from all the states according to the edict of the Roman king, in order that they should neither have a general of their own, nor a separate command, nor their own standards, he compounded companies of Latins and Romans, so as to make one out of two, and two out of one; the companies being thus doubled, he appointed centurions over them'. If true, this mention by Livy of the first mixed *manipuli* of Romans and Latin allies, commanded by Roman centurions, was a temporary expedient promoted by Tarquinius, because the presence of Latin contingents in the Roman army became general only later. But it is important to underline that the technical term used by Livy for companies is *manipuli*, which had also been used before the 'manipular reforms' (see below) to indicate a regiment. Unfortunately Livy does not give us the size of each *manipulus*, but we might suggest the hypothesis that they were previously formed of 50 men, because according to his text a centurion would now lead a doubled company. So it may be that at the time of Tarquinius the *centuria* of 100 men was composed of two *manipuli* each 50 strong.



Helmet of Negau typology fitted with a support for a *crista transversa*, from southern Etruria, 6th–5th century BC. This contrasts with the 'fore-and-aft' crest supports on other helmets, suggesting possible use by an officer. (Villa Giulia Museum, Rome, inv. n. 44429; photo author's collection)

THE EARLY CONSULAR PERIOD

With the advent of the age of the consuls in 509 BC, the citizen army was divided into two distinct and autonomous formations, each of them with 3,000 heavy hoplites (armoured spearmen), 1,200 light infantrymen, and about 300 cavalrymen. This division of the army into two legions was clearly intended to limit each of that year's pair of consuls to identical military manpower and thus political power. It is highly probable that the *centuriae*

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LEFT **Terracotta figurine showing a warrior with a round shield, from the Roman sanctuary of Campetti in Veii; first half of 5th century BC – compare with Plate A1. (Drawing by Andrea Salimbeti, ex-Antonucci)**

RIGHT **Reconstruction from a carving on a stone sarcophagus of the 4th century BC from Volterra, showing Etruscans sacrificing Roman prisoners; the transverse crest suggests a centurion. (Drawing by Andrea Salimbeti, ex-Coussin)**

were soon divided into two halves, to keep the number at the disposition of each consul at a constant level. Their average strength was therefore about 50 men, and this would explain why, at the time of Polybius in the mid 2nd century BC, the *manipuli* are described as composed of two c*enturiae* of 60 men each. Each consular legion was composed of tactical companies of three different troop types: 20 *centuriae* of *principes*, five *centuriae* of *triarii*, and 12 *centuriae* of *velites* or *velati* (see below). In 493 BC we find the first mention of the *centurio primipilus* – 'first javelin', i.e. the centurion of the first *manipulus* of the *triarii* or *veterani* (Livy, II, 27, 6).

Organization of the manipular legion

With Rome's new age of aggressive territorial expansion the rigid hoplite phalanx, characteristic of the previous age, no longer met the army's tactical needs. The reforms of the 4th century BC, ascribed to the great figure of Camillus, signalled the change from a hoplite organization to a more flexible manipular array for the legion, which was now drawn up into the so-called *acies triplex* (i.e. with its constituent units deployed in three lines). A new sort of *manipulus* was now created. In describing the manipular formation, Livy (VIII, 8) gives the following scheme: 'And what had formerly been a phalanx formation, like the Macedonian phalanxes, later became a line of battle formed by units (*manipuli*), with the rearmost portion [i.e. the *triarii*] being drawn up in (smaller) companies (*ordines*)'. Livy specifies that each *ordo* is composed of 60 men, two centurions, and a *vexillarius* (standard-bearer). In later sources the term *ordo* is synonymous with *centuria*, but in the 4th century BC was probably used to mean the *manipulus*; so every *manipulus* was (given the presence of two centurions) formed by joining together two *centuriae*, now apparently of only about 30 men each.

According to Livy's explanation of the different troop types, the first line of the battle array (*prima acies*) was formed of *hastati*, young men at the height of their vigour, and was divided into 15 maniples each of 60 men (plus two centurions and the standard-bearer). Attached to the maniple,

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or distributed amongst it, there were also 20 lightly-armed men (*leves*). The second line (*secunda acies*) was divided into 15 maniples of more seasoned soldiers, called *principes*. These first two lines totalling 30 maniples were arrayed 'in front of the standards' (*signa*) and also in front of the units called *pili* (see below) – they were therefore collectively termed the *antesignani* or *antepilani*.

Behind them were positioned the standards; and behind those, in the third line of battle, were stationed another 15 companies (*ordines*). Each of these consisted of 186 men, divided into three sections called *vexilla* ('banners'), each of 60 men with two centurions and a standard-bearer. The first section in each *ordo* was called the *pilus*, and was composed of *triarii* – older veterans of high skill and valour (*spectate virtutis*) but, presumably, shorter endurance. The second *vexillum* in each *ordo* was formed of *rorarii*, and the third one of *accensi* – 'men of less dependable quality, for this reason arrayed in the rear line' (Livy, VIII, 8). This structure for the 4th-century BC *legio* thus required 150 centurions.

It is interesting to note that in the Romans' clash with their Latin neighbours – previously allies and now enemies – the latter had also adopted a manipular formation: 'The two armies were drawn up in the same formation, and they knew that if the maniples kept their order they would have to fight, not only *vexilla* with *vexilla*, *hastati* with *hastati*, *principes* with *principes*, but even centurion with centurion. There were amongst the *triarii* two centurions, one in each army – the Roman, possessing little bodily strength but an energetic and experienced soldier, [and] the Latin, a man of enormous strength and a splendid fighter. [They were] very well known to each other, because they had always served in the same company. The Roman, distrusting his own strength, had obtained the consuls' permission before leaving Rome to choose his own sub-centurion to protect him from the man who was destined to be his opponent. This youth, finding himself face to face with the Latin centurion, gained a victory over him.'

Greek hero represented as Etrusco-Roman centurion with *crista transversa*, from an Etruscan urn of the 4th–3rd century BC found in the Tomba della Pellegrina, Chiusi – compare with Plate D3. (Author's collection)

The legion of the 3rd–2nd centuries BC

In the military organization described by Polybius (VI, 24) – who probably refers to the period predating the 'Marian' reforms of the consul Gaius Marius, and more specifically to 149–146 BC – we can detect important changes to the manipular formation since the start of the Punic Wars a century before that date. According to Polybius, each of the three battle-lines of different troop types was now composed of ten *manipuli*; but additionally, the legion incorporated a fourth troop type, the *velites* (*grosfomachoi*). These lightly armed skirmishers were chosen from among the youngest (*neotatoi*) and the poorest men. In age and social class, the *hastati* were next above them, followed by those in the prime of life, or *principes*, and the oldest of all, the veteran *triarii* (also termed *pili*). The *legio* was formed of these four troop types in the proportions 600 *triarii*, 1,200 *principes*, 1,200 *hastati*,

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and 1,000 *velites*. In total there were 30 *manipuli*, thus 60 *centuriae*. Polybius gives a strength of 4,000 men for the legion, specifying (VI, 20, 8) that even if the total exceeded this, the number of the *triarii* was always limited to 600.

The centurions

The officers in command were 20 centurions from each of the three heavy troop types. The senior elected centurion was termed the *primus pilus*, and had a seat in the military council. The junior officers (*optiones*) positioned behind each *centuria* were appointed by the centurions, at least from the time of the Pyrrhic Wars in 280–275 BC. 'From each of the classes except the youngest [i.e. the *velites*] they elect ten centurions according to merit, and then they elect a second ten. All these are called *centuriones*, and the first man elected has a seat in the military council. The *centuriones* then appoint an equal number of rearguard officers (*optiones*). Next, in conjunction with the centurions, they divide each [troop-]class into ten companies, except the *velites*, and assign to each company two *centuriones* and two *optiones* from among the elected officers'. Thus there were two centurions for each of the 30 companies (*ordines/manipuli/vexilla*) of heavy infantry. When both centurions of a company were present, the one who had been elected first commanded the right half of the maniple and the second the left; otherwise, a single centurion commanded the whole *manipulus*. The *velites*, meanwhile, were equally distributed for attachment to all the heavy companies; their officers were called centurions or *ordinum ductores*.

Roman officer's panoply of the 3rd–2nd century BC, represented on a statue of Mars, God of War, once kept in the temple of the Area Sacra of Sant'Omobono, Rome. (Musei Capitolini, Rome; author's photo, courtesy Prof Marina Mattei)

We cannot exclude the possibility that this organization was already in use at the beginning of the Punic Wars in 264 BC, and it lasted until Marius' reforms in 107–104 BC. In this new manipular organization the maniple was the main tactical unit; the officer commanding the half-maniple or *centuria* on the right side (or in front) was identified as the *prior* centurion, and the leader of the left-hand (or rear) century as the *posterior*. The posts of the centurions throughout the 30 heavy infantry maniples of the legion were specified both by seniority and by troop type – *hastati*, *principes*, and *pili* (ex-*triarii*); there were 20 *centuriones* – ten *priores* and ten *posteriores* – of each of the three troop types. Polybius several times makes clear (III, 84, 92) that the *tribunes* and *centuriones* were the officers who were deputed to take decisions when in the field.

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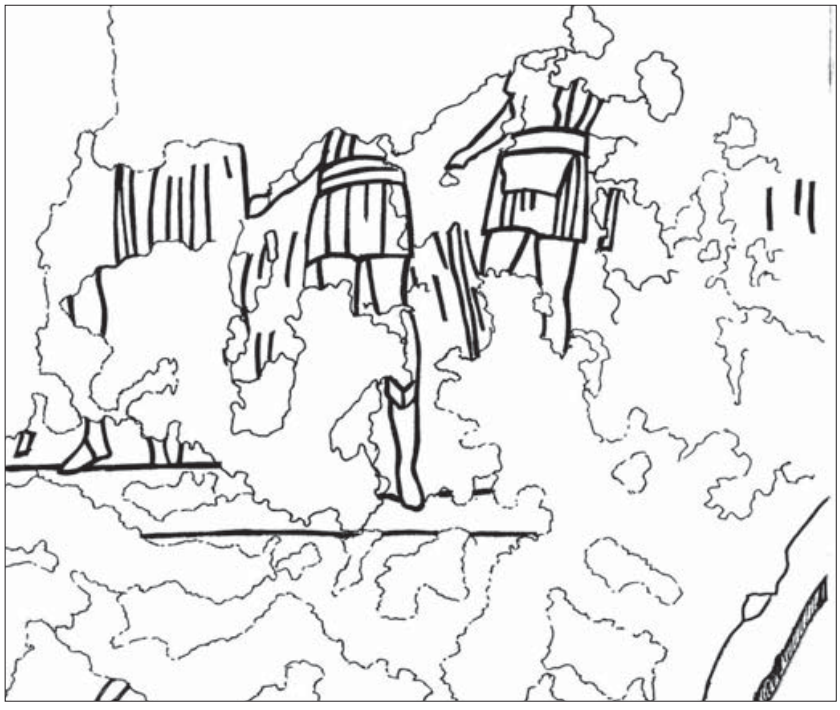

Drawing of fragmentary frescoes from the Scipionii tomb on the Via Appia, Rome; these are a fundamental source for Roman military clothing of the Punic Wars. From left to right, the first soldier wears a blue tunic decorated with a couple of white *clavi* (stripes) and off-white boots; the central figure has a red tunic with two doubled white *clavi*, gathered at the waist with a yellow cloth belt, while his boots are black. The centurion, at right, is wearing what seems to be a cuirass with attached alternate rows of red and white *pteryges*, and has a short brown *sagulum* folded on his left arm; his right hand leans upon a clearly visible brown staff – the *vitis latina*. (Drawing by Giuseppe Rava)

THE LATE CONSULAR PERIOD

The cohortal legion

In the simplest terms, by the last years of the 2nd century BC the vastly increased military commitments of an aggressively expansionist Rome could no longer be sustained by the traditional system of raising armies annually by citizen levies. The reforms of *c.*107–104 BC associated with the name of Marius (though also the work of others) increasingly professionalized the army, introducing long-term enlistment. The evolution of the centurion into a career officer followed these reforms, coinciding with the development of the cohort (*cohors*) as the permanent tactical sub-unit of the legion.

The cohort had originally been a temporary grouping of three maniples (thus six *centuriae*) – one maniple each of *hastati*, *principes* and *pili*. This kind of front-to-back 'slice' through the legion's battle array, to create a temporary task-group, is attested as early as the 3rd century BC (Polybius, II, 23, 1); but it was in the last years of the 2nd century that it emerged as a permanent unit. It continued to comprise six *centuriae*, each now 100 men strong when at full strength – the previously smaller companies of the *triarii/pili* being equalized with those of the other two troop types. Since each legion was now composed of ten cohorts, totalling 60 *centuriae* (*ordines*), the number of centurions was unchanged.

Although the maniple – one-third part of a cohort – would gradually wither away as a tactical identity over the next 50 years, the old titles of command within the cohort of six *centuriae* were retained; there were still *centuriones priores* and *posteriores*, leading in each cohort pairs of *centuriae* of – in ascending order of seniority – *hastati*, *principes* and *pili* (ex-*triarii*). The

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centurions' titles indicated the number of their cohort – First to Tenth within the legion; the senior or junior relative status of their *centuria*; and its old troop type. The six centurions within each cohort ranked, from senior to junior, as *pilus prior*, *pilus posterior*, *princeps prior*, *princeps posterior*, *hastatus prior*, and *hastatus posterior*. For example, the *decimus pilus prioris centuriae* was thus the commander of the right or front (senior) *centuria* of the *pili* within the Tenth Cohort, and so on. (The sources of Gaius Julius Caesar's time use the term *centurio decimi ordinis*, since the word *ordo* was now synonymous with *centuria* – *BG*, V, 30; V. Paterculus II, 112.)

The cohort to which the *centuria* belonged indicated its leader's relative precedence within the legion; the junior centurion in the whole legion was thus the *decimus hastatus posterior*. The senior centurion of the legion was the *centurio prior* of the *pili* within the First Cohort – the *primus pilus*. This officer headed the *primi ordines*, the ten senior centurions who participated in councils of war with the *consul* (general), the *legatus* (commander of a *legio*), and his *tribuni* (aristocratic short-service officers, superior in status to the centurions).

Most centurions commanded a *centuria* of 83 men, including their *principales* or senior soldiers – the *optio* second-in-command, *signifer* standard-bearer (in the *centuria* of the *primus pilus*, the *aquilifer*), and the *tesserarius* or administrative assistant. Generals might manipulate the numbers by creating double- and half-strength units; Caesar, for instance, made the first *centuria* double-strength (incidentally, it appears that the titles of centurions in his army did not always echo the old manipular structure).

Some senior centurions also filled staff roles in their legion; but it is not believed that each legionary cohort had a separate commanding centurion, as distinct from the commander of that cohort's most senior *centuria*.

Small statuette representing a *centurio* of the 3rd–2nd century BC. (Author's collection)

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CAREER AND STATUS

The early periods

While the centurions were the most experienced, efficient and reliable soldiers in the Roman army, it is not easy to trace the career-path along which they gained their promotions. This succession of promotions – their *cursus honorum* – was strictly linked with their social background and status. The rules regulating the way in which they might rise from the least to the most prestigious of appointments, and even to much higher levels of power, were fixed; but we do not know exactly how this system worked, so we have to try to reconstruct it based upon the Roman sources at our disposal. We have seen that since the beginning of Roman history the main criterion for promotion to the centurionate was bravery in battle, and under the Early Consulate both Polybius and Livy suggest that the centurions were men of modest social background. In some cases we can trace their individual careers.

The first evident example of a centurion's glorious military career is represented by the 5th-century BC Lucius Siccius Dentatus, whom Aulus Gellius remembers as 'the Roman Achilles' (*Noct. Att.*, II, 11); he may in fact have been a mythical figure, but even so his supposed virtues and exploits are indicative of how a heroic centurion was perceived. The historian Ross Cowan has suggested that it may have been from his ferocity in battle that he received the third name (*cognomen*) of *dentatus*, which can mean 'having teeth', in the sense of the fangs of a wild animal; but Cowan also notes, correctly, that Roman *cognomina* were often quite

Greek heroes represented as Etrusco-Roman centurions, on an Etruscan urn from Volterra, 3rd–2nd century BC. Note the Apulo-Corinthian helmets fitted with transverse crests. (Author's photos, courtesy Firenze Archaeological Museum)

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Knee-piece from a bronze greave, 2nd–1st century BC, excavated from a temple site at Ardea. This extraordinary fragment, deeply embossed with a Medusa head motif, was once attached to the main body of the greave with a hinge and a clasp. It is the earliest known example of this type of leg armour, which would become common under the Empire. (Museo delle Navi di Nemi, photo author's collection)

derogatory, and in this case *dentatus* might simply refer to bad or prominent teeth.

Dentatus was a plebeian, and according to Dionysius (*Rom.*, X, 8, 11) he was aged 27 when he received his first military award, the *corona aurea* or Gold Crown (Wreath). Serving in the ranks as a *miles gregarius* (common soldier), Dentatus – whose legion had been defeated by the Volsci – single-handedly recaptured the standards, and so 'saved the centurions from incurring everlasting disgrace'. Eventually promoted to *primus pilus*, Dentatus was a veteran of 120 battles, and of eight or nine single combats to which he was challenged by enemies; he stripped the spoils from 34 or 36 defeated foes. He could show 45 battle-scars (12 of them sustained in a single fight, against the Sabine Erdonius), all of his wounds being to the front of his body. He was finally elevated to the rank of military tribune, only to fall victim to a plot by his political enemies of the aristocratic party, who learned that he was working to persuade the common soldiers to press for their political rights (Livy, III, 43). Even in death his bravery remained legendary: he killed many of his attackers before he fell, and the discovery of his body surrounded by slaughtered assassins caused a mutiny in the army, with the consequent downfall of the tyrannical oligarchy of *Decemviri* that was then ruling Rome:

'The others reported at the camp that they had fallen into an ambuscade, and that Siccius had perished, fighting valiantly, and with him certain soldiers. At first their report was believed, and afterwards a cohort set out, by permission of the Decemvirs, to bury the slain. However, finding that none of the bodies had been despoiled [stripped], and that Siccius lay armed in the midst, with all the bodies facing him, while the enemy had left no dead nor any indication of having withdrawn, they brought back the corpse, and declared that Siccius had certainly been murdered by his own men. The camp was ablaze with indignation, and it was resolved that Siccius should be carried to Rome forthwith, but the Decemvirs made haste to give him a military funeral at public expense. The soldiers sorrowed greatly at his burial, and the worst reports about the Decemvirs were circulated'.

It is clear from the example of L. Siccius that in the period of the Early Consulate the centurionate was one of the best ways by which plebeians could rise to high levels in the army, where they could champion plebeian rights against the dominance of the patricians.

The 3rd–2nd centuries BC

From the evidence of Archaic Latin poetry, the most famous centurion of the Punic Wars was Ennius. In his *Punica* (XII, 392ff.), Silius Italicus describes his presence, under the command of the *Praetor* Manlius Torquatus, in the Roman operations waged against Hampsagoras (Ampsicora), the Sardinian-Punic aristocrat who led the Sardinian

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insurrection against Rome in 215 BC: 'Foremost in the fight was Ennius, a scion of the ancient stock of King Messapus, and his right hand held the vine-staff. He came from the rugged land of Calabria, and he was a son of ancient Rudiae – Rudiae which now owes all her fame to this child of hers. He fought in the van…'. This provenance is important: it establishes that the rank of centurion was at that time also open to non-Latins, and that there were contingents of allied *socii* organized according to the Roman system.

We know that Ennius was in Sardinia during this campaign, but not when he arrived – whether with Manlius Torquatus, or later in 213 BC, with Legio IX, to garrison the *Provincia Sardiniae* assigned to the *Propraetor* Aulus Cornelius Mamulla. (According to the historian Corona the earlier date is more probable, because after the battle of Cannae in 216 BC the cities in the region of Salento, including Ennius' birthplace of Rudiae, passed to Hannibal and did not furnish any further contingents to the Roman army.) After the end of the revolt Ennius remained in Sardinia for another ten years. At the conclusion of the war with Hannibal, in 203 BC he returned to Rome, where he was soon linked with Cato the Elder and with the family of the Scipiones, in whose burial plot he was laid to rest. It is notable that in the few surviving fragments of the paintings once decorating this tomb of the Scipionii on the Appian Way three Roman soldiers are clearly visible, among them a centurion with his vine-staff.

The panoply of a centurion of the time of Sulla, from the Campidoglio monument of 91 BC, now in the Musei Capitolini, Rome. Note the Boeotian style of helmet with a transverse crest, and the *thorax statos* cuirass with two ranges of *pteryges*. In many armours of this typology the *pteryges* were not part of an undergarment, but attached directly to the lower edge of the armour. Compare with Plate E3. (Musei Capitolini, Centrale Montemartini; photo author's collection)

Promotion

Each *centuria* had its place of precedence within the cohort. A centurion's seniority within the cohort and the legion depended on his *centuria*; centurions began by leading junior *centuriae* before being promoted to the command of more senior ones, but exactly how they progressed up the hierarchy within a legion is not understood.

Some scholars have suggested that promotion took a man from *hastatus posterior*, to *princeps posterior*, to *pilus posterior*, and then to *hastatus prior*, *princeps prior*, and finally *pilus prior* (Livy, XLII, 34). Other authorities suggest that from *decimus hastatus prior* (senior of the two centurions of *hastati* in the Tenth Cohort), he would be promoted to *nonus hastatus posterior* (junior of the two centurions of *hastati* in the Ninth Cohort), and so on.

Centurions could be elected, appointed by the Senate, or promoted from the ranks by the tribunes for a variety of reasons, of which military virtue was the most relevant. A second important representative example is offered by Spurius Ligustinus, of the Crustumina tribe – probably a new tribe of Sabine stock, established in Rome since 495 BC. Livy (XLII, 34) outlines his *cursus honorum*, from his first service in 200 BC, when this humble plebeian farmer left the acre of land and

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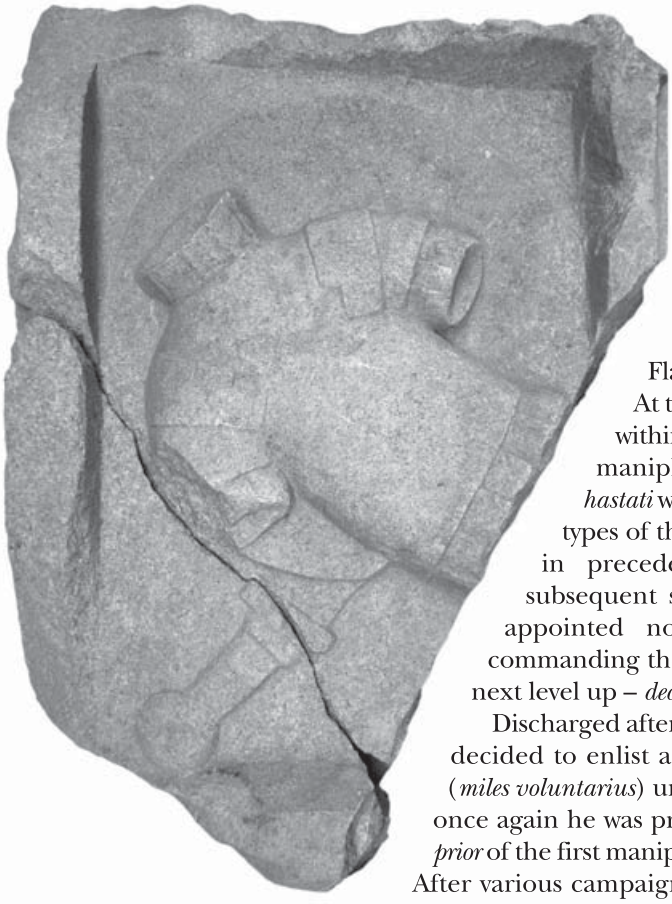

From the great Caesarean-period Doric frieze at Aquileia, a depiction of what seems to be a leather armour – note short sleeves with *pteryges* – set against a round shield. The sources often associate the circular *clipeus* shield with centurions. (Author's photo, courtesy National Archaeological Museum, Aquileia)

the hut he had inherited from his father to serve as a common soldier in the consular armies of Publius Sulpicius and Gaius Aurelius. In Livy's text Ligustinus narrates the story of his career, and again the common denominator of his promotions is bravery in battle.

During the third year of his military service, in the war against Philip V of Macedon (r.221–179 BC), Ligustinus was promoted by the Consul Titus Quinctius Flamininus to centurion's rank for his bravery. At this date the maniple was still the tactical unit within the legion, and the text speaks of the tenth maniple of the *hastati*. As explained above, the *hastati* were the most junior of the three main troop types of the legion, and the tenth maniple the lowest in precedence within the formation. From his subsequent status, it seems likely that Ligustinus was appointed not to the lowest post in the legion, commanding the junior *centuria* of that maniple, but to the next level up – *decimus hastatus prior*.

Discharged after the end of the Macedonian war, Ligustinus decided to enlist again, serving in Spain as a private soldier (*miles voluntarius*) under the Consul M. Porcius Cato in 195 BC; once again he was promoted for bravery, to the rank of *centurio prior* of the first maniple of *hastati* (*primus hastatus prioris centuriae*). After various campaigns his distinguished conduct brought him the rank of senior centurion in the first maniple of *principes* (*primus princeps prioris centuriae*); and he was finally appointed *primipilus* of a legion on four occasions over the space of a few years (it is believed that this appointment within a particular legion was of only one year's duration). By 171 BC, by now over 50 years old, Ligustinus had served for a total of 22 years, and had received 34 awards for his courage and prowess, including six Civic Crowns for saving the life of a comrade.

The Late Consular period

The information we have for the mid 1st century BC seems to shed a significantly different light on the social status of centurions. The change over the previous hundred years was due mainly to the development in the professional status of soldiers in general after the Marian reforms. Equestrian status – membership of the 'equestrian order', a distinct and superior social class, defined by wealth – seems have become quite widespread among the centurionate.

For example, the father of Marcus Petreius, a legate under Pompey in Spain, was probably a *primipilus* already belonging to the equestrian order; he may well have been the same *Primipilus* Gnaeus Petreius decorated by Marius in 102 BC (*HN*, XXII, 11). Further evidence of this change is visible in the context of the 'proscriptions' – the lists of death-warrants drawn up during the savage civil wars of the period. Sulla's list was immediately posted by one Fufidius, identified by Orosius as a *primipilus* (V, 21). This man's family, the Arpinates Fufidii, had already obtained equestrian status in a

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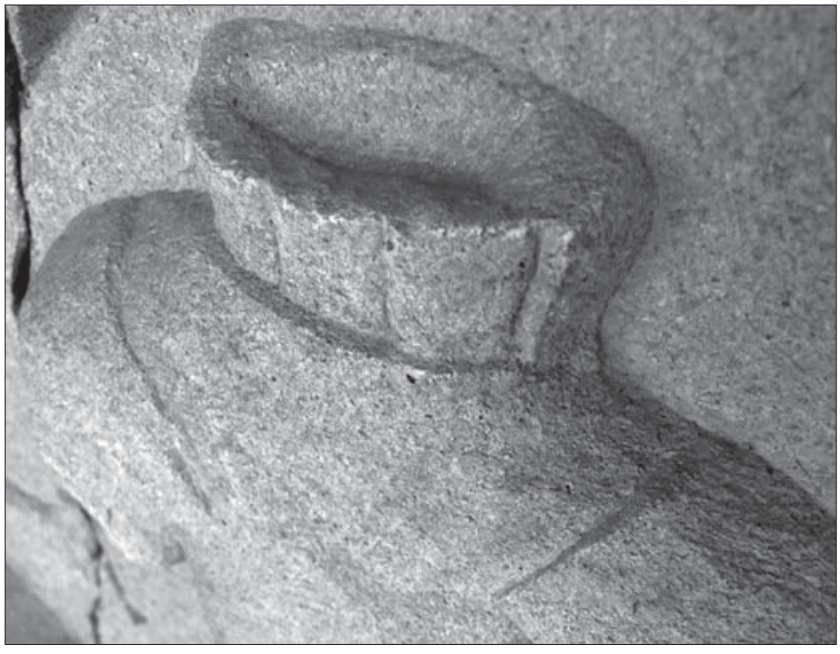
This helmet, like others in the Aquileia reliefs, seems to represent an original of Agen-Port or Buggenum typology, in this case showing a centurion's *crista transversa* emerging from a 'tulip'-shaped crest holder. Compare with Plate G3. (Author's photo, courtesy National Archaeological Museum, Aquileia)



The reliefs of Aquileia and Narbonne often show armours with gorget-like neck protection. This is perhaps a leather version (*corium*) of the *linothorax*, with such a neckpiece – again, see reconstruction, Plate G3. The carving of this detail indicates that the neck protection was part of a *subarmalis*, a padded linen and felt armour worn under the leather cuirass. The padded armour was sometimes worn alone, and termed a *coactile* or *cento*. (Author's photo, courtesy National Archaeological Museum, Aquileia)

previous generation. Now Fufidius advanced further up the social ladder, being admitted to the Senate, probably by Sulla; he became *praetor* in 81 BC, and received the governorship of Hispania Citerior the following year. The identification of the centurion Fufidius with the governor Fufidius is virtually certain, given that Lepidus' speech in Sallust's histories (*Hist., Oratio Lep.*, 20) describes Fufidius as the most repellent of all mortals – an obvious reference to the dirty work he had performed during Sulla's purges.

Other examples include *Primipilus* Lucius Petronius from Placentia, who attained equestrian status in time to fall victim to Cinna (*Val. Max.*, 4.7.5). The grandfather of the noted jurist Ateius Capito was a centurion of the equestrian class under Sulla. Two of the *primipili* listed on the staff

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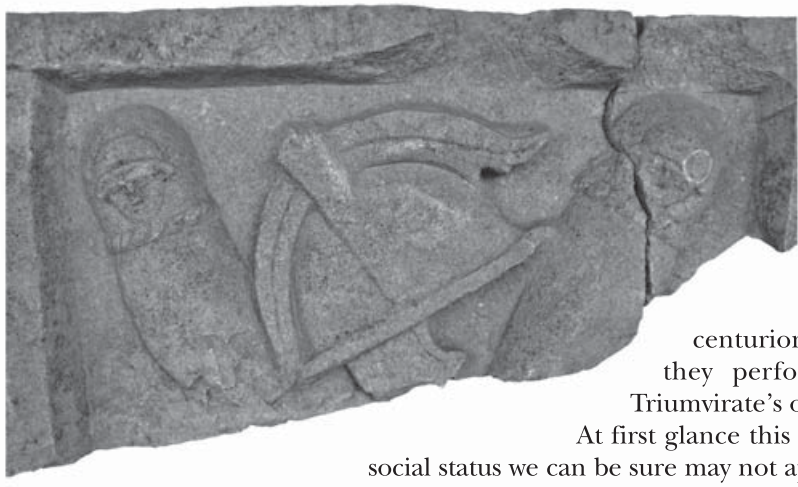

A pair of centurion's greaves, together with a helmet of Coolus-Hagenau typology. (Author's photo, courtesy National Archaeological Museum, Aquileia)

of Pompeius Strabo in 89 BC were also recognizably of upper-class status, one equestrian and one municipal. We may also note that after the proscriptions ordered by Marcus Antonius and C. Octavianus Caesar at the time of the Second Triumvirate, town magistracies were given not only to tribunes but also to centurions in reward for the bloody services they performed in the execution of the Triumvirate's orders.

At first glance this sample of centurions about whose social status we can be sure may not appear very wide; but it is significant that both Caesar and Cicero seem to expect to find men of the equestrian class being appointed centurions, and that this was regarded as a position befitting their social status. In the mid 1st century BC the social gap between commanders, senior officers and centurions does not seem to have been as wide as previously. When the centurions of the legions stationed near Apollonia on the Illyrian coast (in modern Albania) first offered their support to Octavian immediately after the death of Julius Caesar, this was an endorsement that 'Salvidienus and Agrippa advised him not to reject' (Vell. Pat., II, 59).

Nevertheless, it was centurions of plebeian extraction who formed and moved the mobs during the terrible civil wars. When the *Senatoconsultus* gave Caesar the ultimatum to disband his troops or be proclaimed a public enemy, from all parts of the country large numbers of those who had belonged to the old Pompeian armies were called up for active service, attracted by hopes of plunder and high military rank. Many centurions of the two legions recently transferred by Caesar also received orders to attend, with the result that the city was soon crowded with regimental officers, centurions and reservists.

Julius Caesar is said to have promoted his centurions for displays of valour. In a representative passage of *De Bello Civili* (I, 46), the author mentions that a certain Q. Fulginius, *centurio primus hastatus* of Legio XIIII (we do not know if *prioris* or *posterioris centuriae*), had been promoted to this position from the ranks for his military prowess. Fulginius had probably begun his career in the centurionate as *decimus hastatus posterior*, being promoted later to the rank of *hastatus prior*. Other historians of this period cite examples of soldiers being elected centurions for being the first over the enemy's wall or through the breach. Loyalty, and bravery in the jaws of death, were the most prized qualities of Caesar's centurions. A centurion of Caesar's Legio X, taken prisoner, declared to the enemy commander-in-chief that he was ready to face the best enemy cohort with just ten of his own men (*BA*, 45). Nevertheless, there were other criteria for promotion than simple bravery in the assault. In Polybius' words, 'They want the centurions not so much to be venturesome and daredevils, as to be natural leaders, of a steady and reliable spirit. They do not so much want men who will initiate attacks and open the battle, but men who will hold their ground when beaten and hard-pressed, and will be ready to die at their posts.'

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It was only after the professionalizing of the army that the centurions came to enjoy the privileges of their rank in terms of economic benefits. They received five times the pay-rate of the average legionary; and they also benefited disproportionately from the periodic bonuses – 'donatives' – that ambitious and self-seeking generals increasingly distributed to their troops. For example, in 64 BC Pompey distributed a donative to his army after extracting a huge payment for supporting King Tigranes II of Armenia against his father; each soldier was given 50 drachmas, each centurion 1,000, and each tribune 10,000 drachmas (Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, 104).

While badly worn, this carving of the hilt of a *gladius hispaniensis* is similar to those of many Caesarian swords illustrated on the monuments from Narbonne and from the Arch of Carpentras. (Author's photo, courtesy National Archaeological Museum, Aquileia)

DUTIES AND SERVICE

The primary role of the centurions was the training of recruits and the continued drilling, supervision, and allocation of duties to the soldiers. In the task of transforming rough country farmers and shepherds into the most fearsome warriors of the ancient world, no brutality was spared, especially after the army lost its former character as an annual citizen levy and became a long-term profession separated from civil society. On the one hand, centurions were hated and feared for physical brutality and extracting bribes; on the other, because they led their men in person and from the front, hatred was transformed into admiration and respect on the battlefield, and they sometimes earned the real devotion of their men. Their privileges spared them from mundane fatigues, but on campaign they shared every hardship. For example, during his siege of Alexandria, Caesar ordered his centurions to lay aside all other duties and apply themselves day and night to the digging of wells, to frustrate the attempts of the Ptolemaic army to deprive the Romans of water (*BA*, 9).

In camp, an important duty was supervising the construction of the trenches and fortifications. According to Polybius (VI, 34, 41), the centurions personally directed the soldiers in the work of entrenchment and stockading, and the most expert centurions and tribunes were deputed to choose where to locate the *praetorium*, the tented headquarters of the commander. According to Cicero (*In Cat.*, II), the responsibility of pitching a camp near Fiesole for Catilina's army, in anticipation of that general's arrival, was given to a centurion named Manlius.

By the 2nd century BC the routines for the distribution of orders in camp were already well codified. Every day at dawn the cavalry officers and centurions attended the tents of the tribunes, and the tribunes proceeded to that of the consul. He gave the necessary orders to the tribunes, and they passed them on to the cavalry officers and centurions, who conveyed them to the soldiers at the proper time. It was a duty of the centurion of the First Maniple of *triarii* to ensure that a trumpet sounded to signal the beginning of each watch (Polybius, VI, 35). In the

Detail of one of the greaves in the picture opposite; note the small helmeted head motif on the knee-piece. The 'roped border' seems to indicate a hinge and clasp fastening the knee-piece to the shin-piece, as illustrated on page 12. (Author's photo, courtesy National Archaeological Museum, Aquileia)

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Roman centurion in battle, from the mausoleum of the Julii in Glanum (Saint-Remy), end of the 1st century BC; compare with Plate G1. He is identifiable as a centurion by his tall feathered crest, easily visible to his soldiers when in battle. Although it is not mounted transversely, his identification as a centurion can be supported by comparison with a similarly crested helmet on the funerary stele of a centurion from Este. This man seems to wear ringmail amour and to carry a round *clipeus*. Contemporary reliefs from Narbonne, celebrating Caesar's victories in Gaul, include a clear depiction of ringmail armour with *humeralia* shoulder reinforcements, and gathered by a substantial leather belt. (Photo courtesy Dr Marco Lucchetti)

same passage Polybius describes the involvement of the centurions in the complex procedure for the checking of the *tesserae* (i.e. the tablets on which the passwords were inscribed):

'At daybreak each of the men who have gone the rounds brings back the *tesserae* to the tribune. If they deliver them all, they are allowed to depart without question; but if one of them delivers fewer [tablets] than the number of guardposts visited, they find out by examining the signs on the *tesserae* which station is missing, and on ascertaining this the tribune calls the centurion of the maniple; he brings before him the men who were on picket duty, and they are confronted with the patrol. If the fault is that of the picket, the patrol [centurion] makes matters clear at once by calling the men who had accompanied him… [but if this is not so], the fault rests on him. A court-martial composed of all the tribunes at once meets to try him, and if he is found guilty he is punished by the *fustuarium* [i.e. beaten with clubs, *fustes*]'.

This reminds us that the centurions, like the soldiers, were subject to corporal punishments, and even to decimation – the execution of one man in every ten. Appian (*Civil Wars*, 26) records that in the Illyrian campaigns of Octavian (34 BC) a cohort that had abandoned its position in the battle for the Dalmatian city of Promona was obliged to cast lots, and every tenth man was put to death, including two of the centurions. On another occasion (Appian, 47), when Caesar had condemned 12 men of his Legio VIIII to be put to death for a mutiny, one of them was able to prove that he was absent when the conspiracy was formed, and Caesar put to death in his stead the centurion who had accompanied him.

For a centurion to give way to fear in battle was punishable by death. In 38 BC a *primus pilus* named Vibillius panicked and fled from a battlefield in the Iberian Peninsula. That he had reached such a rank argues that he had been a very brave warrior, but we know that a man has only a finite reserve of courage, and even the most experienced of soldiers can collapse under repeated pressure. The governor of the province decided to make an example of Vibillius, and ordered that he should be killed by being beaten to death with *fustes* by the comrades whose lives he had put in danger by fleeing from the battlefield (Velleius Paterculus, II, 78, 3).

It is not surprising that men subjected to such merciless discipline should themselves show brutality off the battlefield. The captured wife of the Galatian king Ortiagon was violently raped by a centurion, but he paid for his crime when she was ransomed (Polybius, XXI, 38): 'Chiomara, the wife of Ortiagon, was captured with the other women when the Asiatic Gauls were defeated by the Romans under Manlius. The centurion into whose hands she fell took advantage of his prisoner with a soldier's brutality, and did violence to her. The man was indeed an ill-bred lout, the slave both of gain and of lust, but his love of gain prevailed; and as a considerable sum had been promised him for the woman's ransom, he brought her to a certain place to deliver her up…. When the Galatians crossed [the river] and, after handing him the money, were taking possession of Chiomara,

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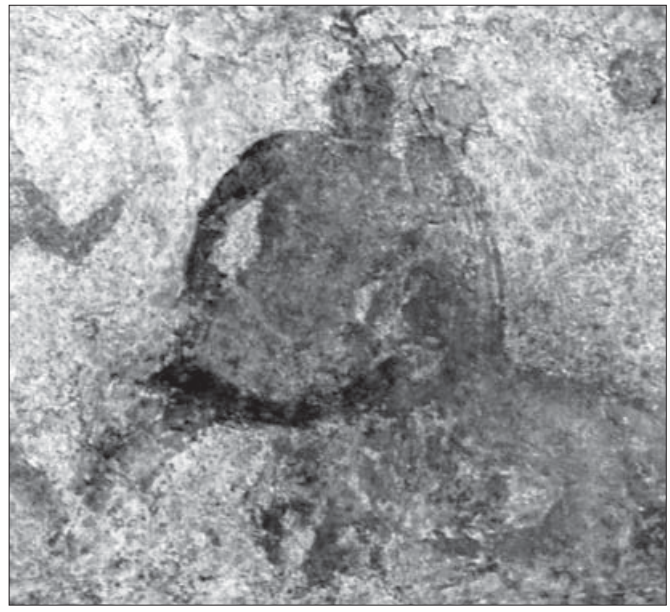
she signed to one of them to strike the [centurion] as he was taking an affectionate leave of her [sic!]. The man obeyed and cut off his head, which she took up and wrapped in the folds of her dress' – and later presented it to her husband.

Apart from their responsibility for tactical leadership, it seems that at the beginning of the Consular period a centurion might also act as a standard-bearer, or at least was responsible for its safety. During one battle the legendary L. Siccius Dentatus, while still a common soldier of Legio II, saw his *primus pilus* knocked to the ground by the enemy, who seized from him the eagle standard (*aquila*, *aetos*). Siccius rushed forward and recovered the sacred standard, at the same time saving the life of his *primus pilus*. This heroic action was rewarded by the consul with Siccius' promotion to the post of *primus pilus* in Legio I, after he had turned down the offer of replacing the shamed *primus pilus* of Legio II. The source for this story, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, records that the officer he had saved wanted to give Siccius both the rank and the standard. (At that time the eagle, sacred to Jupiter, was not the principal standard of the legion, but was one of a group of *signa* including the minotaur, the horse, the boar, and the wolf of the god Mars; even so, its association with the supreme god Jupiter perhaps justified its being entrusted in battle to the most senior centurion of the legion.)



A fighting officer, in a fresco from the Esquiline, end of the 1st century BC. The elaborate red transverse crest, the bronze 'muscle' cuirass (*stadios*), and the use of greaves might all suggest his identification as a centurion – see Plate G2. If this is correct, this is to the author's knowledge the only example from the Late Consular period of a centurion's crest being shown as coloured red. (Musei Capitolini, Rome; photo author's collection)

Detached services

Centurions and other selected soldiers were often employed for 'commando' actions and scouting missions. Appian (*Civil Wars*, 35) records that Caesar, at the beginning of his civil war with Pompey, 'sent forward the centurions with a few of their bravest troops in civilian clothing, to get inside the walls of Ariminum and take it by surprise'. Casesar also sent Publius Considius, a centurion of equestrian rank,

Another depiction of greaves of the Caesarian period, perhaps from a centurion's panoply, from the late 1st-century BC Narbonne reliefs. (ex-Esperandieu)

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forward with scouts to explore the positions of the Helvetii. He is described (*BG*, I, 21–22) as an experienced man, who had previously served under Sulla and Crassus. On this occasion, however, struck by fear, he gave an erroneous report of the enemy's positions to Labienus, which frustrated the attack that Caesar had planned to launch against the Helvetians.

Centurions were often selected as the trusted agents of generals for delicate missions. Baculus, for instance, was an agent and personal spy (*speculator*) of Caesar. Salvienus, mentioned in a *epigrafe* from Asculum, was a *primipilus* to whom Sulla entrusted the delicate mission of reporting to him, before Chaeronea, how certain Greek oracles forecast the outcome of affairs in Italy (Plut., *Sull.*, XVII, 4).

Centurions in council

The presence of centurions on command staffs is abundantly recorded by the sources of the Late Consular period (e.g., *BA*, 24). Caesar includes the *centuriones primi ordines* with the military tribunes in his reference to the administrative staff of a legion, and clearly states that centurions were expected to speak in the council of war – as they did, for instance, when they advised against Sabinus' march from his winter quarters (*BG*, V, 28). It is probable that during the Punic Wars centurions were already part of the command staff in the *praetorium*. Writing of the preparations for the battle of Cannae in 216 BC, Appian (*Hannibalic Wars*, 19) records that Varro, 'hurrying, armed as he was, to the headquarters, complained in the presence of senators, centurions and tribunes that Aemilius had made a pretense about the omen in order to snatch a sure victory from the city.'

When the commander was discussing terms with the enemy, the senior centurions (*primi ordines*) accompanied him. For instance, it is recorded that in the winter of 54–53 BC, when Caesar's legate Sabinus was treacherously killed during a parley with the Gallic chief Ambiorix, leader of the Eburones, all his centurions were also massacred (*BG*, V, 37).

In his commentaries, Caesar mentions by name fewer than 50 soldiers, and eight or nine of them are centurions. They were always involved in the major decisions concerning combat, as in the episode recorded in *BG*, II, 5: 'P. Sextius Baculus, a centurion of the first rank, who as we have related had

Clipeus **decorated with a laurel wreath, also from the Narbonne monument. (ex-Esperandieu)**

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been disabled by severe wounds in action against the Nervii, …hastened to Galba [legate of Legio XII] and assured him that the only hope of safety lay in making a sally, and trying the last resource. Whereupon, assembling the centurions, he quickly gave orders to the soldiers…'.

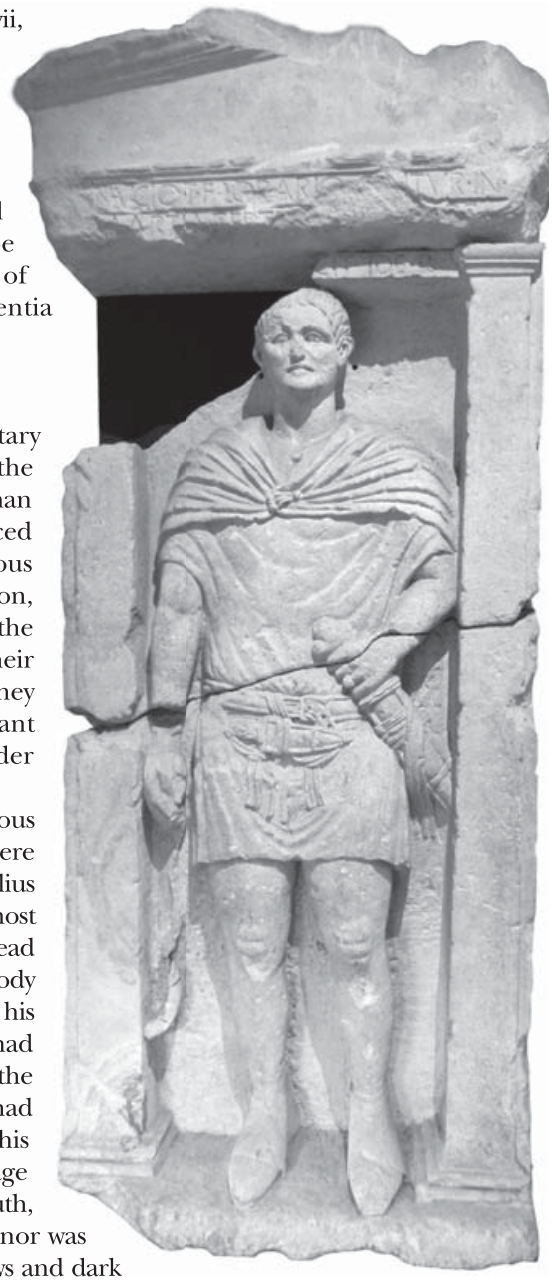
After completing their service with the legions, old centurions with the rank of *primipili* were clearly still regarded as a valuable state resource. They might be appointed as town commandants, as was the case of Caelius, *praepositus* for Octavian in the defence of Placentia against Cinna.

Courage and high casualties

Bravery, strength and steadiness were always the military virtues displayed by centurions. An example comes from the description of the battle of Luceria in 294 BC, when a Roman army under Marcus Atilius Regulus was defeated and forced back by a smaller army of Samnites. During the victorious counterattack by the Romans, driven by the consul in person, the 'centurions snatched the standards from the hands of the bearers and carried them forward, while pointing out to their men how few the enemy were, and in what loose order they were approaching' (Livy, X, 36). This is also a significant reminder of the importance of the Roman close-order fighting tactics instilled by the centurions.

The brave exploits of centurions during the most famous wars of the Roman Republic – those against Carthage – were attested by historians, and immortalized in poetic form by Silius Italicus. Thus, the centurion Laevinus is described in the most extravagant language (*Punica*, VI, 43–57) as being found dead on the battlefield of Lake Trasimene in 217 BC, with his body covering that of an African warrior whom he had killed with his teeth: 'Laevinus, a native of Privernum on the hill, who had earned the distinction of the Roman vine-staff, lay there on the top of Tyres, a Nasamonian, and both were dead. He had neither spear nor sword: Fortune had robbed him of his weapons in the hard fight, yet in the unarmed contest, rage found a weapon to fight with. He had fought with savage mouth, and his teeth did the work of steel, to gratify his rage…. nor was Laevinus satisfied, until the breath left those champing jaws and dark death arrested the crammed mouth.'

Death was very often the reward of bravery, and in the lists of warriors killed in the great Roman defeats the number of dead centurions reported by the sources is very high. During the battle of Cannae, 'Many senators who were present lost their lives, and with them all the military tribunes and centurions' (Appian, *Punic Wars*, 25). When the dead were stripped after the battle of Zela against Mithridates, King of Pontus, 24 tribunes and 150 centurions were found; Appian (*Mithridatic Wars*, 89) writes that 'so great a number of officers had seldom fallen in any single Roman defeat'. (Incidentally, centurions sometimes fought on horseback; in the same passage, Appian writes that Mithridates was wounded by 'a certain Roman centurion, who was riding with him in the guise of an attendant',



Funerary stele of Minucius T.F. Lorarius, a centurion of Legio III Martia, now in the Civic Museum, Padua. This sculpture is unusual for the Late Consular period in showing the full-length figure of the officer, unarmoured but carrying a sword, dagger and centurial staff (*vitis*). See reconstruction, Plate H1. (Author's photo, courtesy of the museum)

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LEFT **The head from the Minucius stele. Small holes were drilled either side of it, for fixing a bronze model of the olive wreath that all legionaries of the Legio Martia were allowed to wear during public festivals. This distinction was a reward for their courage in 43 BC, when fighting for Octavian's ally Aulus Hirtius against Marcus Antonius at the battle of Mutina. (Author's photo, courtesy Civic Museum, Padua)**

RIGHT **Detail from the Minucius stele, showing the tunic button, and the *fibula* of Aucissa type fastening the short cloak. (Author's photo, courtesy Civic Museum, Padua)**

who 'dealt him a severe wound with a sword in the thigh, as he could not expect to pierce his back through his corselet. Those who were near immediately cut the centurion to pieces'.)

The wars of the 1st century BC were one of the periods of Roman history in which the bravery of centurions became legendary. They usually led from the front, occupying a position at the front right of the *centuria* formation, and fighting hand-to-hand alongside their men to lead and inspire them by example. Consequently, they often suffered disproportionately heavy casualties in battle. We can imagine a legion advancing, with the centurions chosen for their bravery and steadiness at the head of each *centuria*, some of them already laden with military decorations, shouting and encouraging their men, and seeking to display the skill and courage that had earned them their rank in the first place. In Epitome IV of his account of the Gallic Wars, writing of the campaign conducted by Caesar in Belgium, Appian notes that the centurions together with the other officers were the enemy's main targets: 'The Nervii defeated him by falling suddenly upon his army as it was getting itself into camp after a march. They made a very great slaughter, killing all of his tribunes and centurions.'

Of the same campaign, Caesar (*BG*, II, 25) tells us that 'he perceived that… all the centurions of the fourth cohort were slain, the standard-bearer killed, and the standard itself lost; almost all the centurions of the other cohorts [were] either wounded or slain, and among them the chief centurion of the legion, P. Sextius Baculus, a very valiant man, who was so exhausted by many severe wounds that he was already unable to support himself… Having therefore snatched a shield from one of the soldiers in the rear (for he himself had come without a shield), [Caesar] advanced to the front of the line; addressing the centurions by name, and encouraging the rest of the soldiers, he ordered them to carry the standards forwards.'

During the civil wars, in the battle of Ilerda between the Caesarians and Afranius, Pompey's deputy in Spain, Afranius lost four centurions and the *centurio primus pilus* of his legion (*BC*, I, 46). In another example, the loss of 38 centurions killed in a single action is mentioned in several of Caesar's passages (e.g. *BA*, 43). In the same way, the centurions were naturally also the first target of mutinous legionaries – as attested (*BA*, 57) when soldiers of Legio XIII mutinied and killed the centurions who opposed them.

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The most famous centurion mentioned in Caesar's commentaries is the above-mentioned *Primus Pilus* P. Sextius Baculus of Legio XII. The historical sources – especially *De Bello Gallico* – paint him as an oft-wounded hero who was ready to fight to the death under Caesar's standard, and who saved his general's life by striking down an enemy who was about to kill him. Many called him 'the staff', i.e. the strong support – a nickname derived both from his family *cognomen* (*baculus* = a small staff), and from the vine-stick that was the centurion's symbol of rank. He is the only soldier mentioned by name three times in Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*. On campaign against the Germans, Baculus, 'who had led a principal century under Caesar (and of whom we have made mention in previous engagements), had been left an invalid in the garrison, and had now been five days without food. He, distrusting his own safety and that of those with him, went forth from his tent unarmed; he saw that the enemy were close at hand and that the situation was of the utmost danger; he snatched arms from those nearest, and stationed himself at the gate. The centurions of the cohort that was on guard followed him; for a short time they sustained the fight together. Sextius fainted, after receiving many wounds, and was only saved with difficulty, being dragged away by the hands of the soldiers'. The circumstances of his death are unknown: according to some authors, Baculus committed suicide at Ostia after Caesar's asassination; according to others, he died at Philippi, fighting in the ranks of Marcus Antonius' army against Brutus and Cassius.

The deeds of the veteran centurion Caesius Scaeva in the engagement at Dyrrachium in 48 BC (*Phars.*, VI, 144–262) are an example of the energy shown by Caesarian centurions on the battlefield. When he saw his soldiers turning back in the face of the Pompeians, he exhorted them to fight; then he stood alone on a turret, driving the enemy back by hurling down stones, bricks, timbers, stakes, and even the corpses of the fallen. His shield and mail armour soon 'bristled with a forest of spears' and arrows; yet he stood his ground, sword in hand in the midst of foes, killing or wounding everyone he struck. His helmet was broken in pieces on his head, and when a Cretan archer's shaft struck his brow the arrow penetrated his eye: but Scaeva 'tore the shaft forth with the eyeball, and with dauntless heel trod them into the dust'! After slaying yet another opponent with the point of the sword, Scaeva was carried away by his comrades, still alive.

It is interesting to note that in this, as in other similar situations, no one is described as coming forward to fight beside the centurion: once he had embarked on a personal combat, it was his alone, to the death if necessary. In battle a centurion could only retreat with his honour intact if the commander ordered the recall, or if the enemy fell back in front of him. These men had to maintain in front of their soldiers the traditions of legendary centurions like L. Siccius Dentatus; they had to be the first to charge into battle, and the last to break off, even sacrificing their lives to cover the retreat of their men. They earned their high pay and privileges the hard way.

This detail shows the trilobate pommel of the *gladius*; note also the heavy ring, clearly carved on the third finger of Minucius' left hand. (Author's photo, courtesy Civic Museum, Padua)

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The detailed depiction of the dagger (*pugio*) on the Minucius stele, with its sheath fixed horizontally below the belt buckle by means of thongs. (Author's photo, courtesy Civic Museum, Padua)

ARMS AND EQUIPMENT

WEAPONS

The offensive equipment of the centurion in the Consular period varied according to his *centuria* and later his *manipulus*: he might be armed with *hasta*, *verutum*, *pilum* or *gaesa*. According to Silius Italicus (VI, 43), the centurions were armed with spear (*hasta*) and sword (*ensis*). In the Roman hoplite phalanx of the Servian age the sword is assigned to the first two classes, and specimens of the curved *machaira* were recovered from Praeneste and Lanuvium. Their wider diffusion, especially among officers, is clearly attested for the early Republican period; and the sword worn on the left side of the body was a distinctive sign of rank, the common legionaries usually wearing it on the right side. During the war against the Privernates in the mid 4th century BC, the centurion Sextus Tullius ordered his men (*antesignani*) to lay aside the javelin and to charge with the unsheathed *gladius* (Livy, VII, 16). Orosius (IV, I, 11) relates that at the battle of Heraclea in 280 BC one Minucius, a centurion of *hastati*, cut the trunk of one of Pyrrhus' elephants with his sword, so buying time for a Roman withdrawal: 'Minucius, the first *hastatus* of the Fourth Legion, used his sword to cut off an elephant's trunk, and forced the beast, now distracted by the pain of his wound, to leave the battle and to vent his rage upon the army to which he belonged.'

At that time the swords of the centurions were those typical of the Greek hoplite – the curved, single-edged *machaira* or the straight, double-edged *xiphos*. The Hellenic *xiphos* is well attested in Latium and the southern Etruscan area; together with the *machaira*, it is often visible in the

(continued on page 33)

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THE AGE OF KINGS
1: Roman officer of Second Class levy, 6th century BC
2: Etrusco-Tarquinian officer, ceremonial order, with lituus
3: Latin centurion, 5th century BC

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EXPANSION IN ITALY, 4th–3rd CENTURIES BC
1: Etruscan centurion from Volterra, 4th C BC
2: Etruscan hoplite from Volterra, c.298 BC
3: Roman princeps, c.290 BC
4: Roman centurion, 4th C BC
1
2
3
4

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hands of centurions represented in Etruscan and Roman art of the 4th to 2nd centuries BC. It was during the 2nd century, especially after the Punic Wars, that the terribly effective new *gladius hispaniensis* appeared, soon becoming the sword *par excellence* of the Roman army.

The *gladius hispaniensis* of the Caesarian period was usually fitted with a trilobate or hemispherical pommel, and a specimen from Saône has a length of about 64.2cm (25.27 inches). The centurion Scaeva – see 'Courage and high casualties', above – is described (*Phars.*, 237) as fighting with a *gladius* furnished with a flashing blade and sharp point (*mucro*). It is probable that in Caesar's time centurions already wore the *gladius* in a silvered scabbard on the left side of the body, as attested on gravestones of centurions of the next century. The interesting account left by Caesar (*BG*, V) of the deeds of the brave centurions Pullo and Vorenus describes details of their armament: the *pilum* (javelin), *scutum* (shield), and the sword carried on a *balteus* (in this case, a baldric) passing over the right shoulder. In one passage, 'Pullo's shield was pierced and a javelin stuck in his *balteus*. This turned aside his scabbard, and obstructed his right arm as he attempted to draw his sword.' This accords with the reliefs of the mausoleum of the Julii at Glanum (Sant-Remy), where a centurion of the Caesarian period is seen with a baldric over his right shoulder. Sometimes, however, the scabbard was attached to a waist belt (*cingulum*), as shown in the relief of Minucius Lorarius from Padua. Minucius' *cingulum* is sturdy, wide, and fastened with a squared buckle similar to bronze specimens found at Numantia; visible in the carving are buckle-claw holes for adjusting the belt to the body.

This image (see pages 23 and 24) gives us an interesting picture of one system of suspension for the *gladius* and a *pugio* (dagger) employing a series of hanging thongs. The Minucius stele shows that at the time of the destruction of the Legio Martia in 42 BC the dagger was worn horizontally over the belly, directly below the waist belt, in a scabbard with a metallic frame and spherical tip. Another kind of dagger worn by centurions could be entirely silver-plated, with decorative tufts as shown in the reliefs from Narbonne; these weapons are similar to those also found at Alesia or Castra Cecilia. Their length was about 25cm (9.8in) long, while the scabbard follows the tapering triangular shape of a blade about 6cm (2.3in) at its widest.

In the right hand the figure of Minucius T.F. Lorarius holds what seems to be the *vitis latina*. The significance of the *ognomen* Lorarius is uncertain, but it is associated with *lorus*, a leather strap or thong. It might indicate the centurion's plebeian background as a leather-worker, or it might carry the meaning of 'flogger'. On the other hand, the centurion's staff is represented here with a very unusual, sinuous shape. Is it, in fact, a *vitis*? Almost certainly – but we cannot entirely exclude the possibility that the nickname *lorarius* was given to Minucius for his employment of a leather strap, rather than a vine-stick, to enforce his authority. (Author's photo, courtesy Civic Museum, Padua)

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The Minucius monument shows short closed boots (*calcei*), apparently with an external flap or doubling over the instep. This recalls a specimen of footwear recovered from the near-contemporary Comacchio ship. (Author's photo, courtesy Civic Museum, Padua)

DEFENSIVE EQUIPMENT

Helmets

The most famous rank distinction of centurions was the transverse crest (*crista transversa*). Vegetius (*Epit.*, II; 12.16) states that this was silvered (*crista transversa argentata*) so that the men might seen it in the heat of the battle, though it is more realistic to suppose that the box-like holder of the crest was silvered, while the hair plume itself was of natural or dyed colours. The presence of a crest set crosswise over the top of the helmet allows us to recognize centurions in the iconography of ancient Etruscan-Roman art from the Age of the Kings onwards. Originally it probably passed to the Romans via the Etruscans, who derived it from Greek or Italiote armies, whose officers – like those of the Spartans – often wore such crests. Among the Etruscans it was probably in use as a badge of rank by the time of Servius Tullius, and it remained the main visual distinction of the Roman centurion until at least the 1st century AD.

The first examples of similar transverse crests are visible on a bronze helmet of Negau typology today in the Etruscan National Museum at Villa Giulia, and dating from the 6th–5th centuries BC. This has a box-like support for a transverse crest on a stalk rising from the skull, and differs from other Negau helmets fitted with supports for conventional 'fore-and-aft' crests. A terracotta temple figure from Caere (Cerveteri) shows a white *crista transversa* edged in red. This *antefissa* dating from the 6th century BC depicts a very particular helmet type, having a skull and complete face mask shaped like a horned Silenus; this corresponds perfectly with an original specimen once preserved in the Archaeological Museum at San Marino. Latin centurions of the 5th century BC used lavishly painted Chalcidian helmets furnished with a transverse crest coloured white and edged red. Sometimes they were fitted with extra frontal tubes for the insertion of two

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feather plumes (*geminae pinnae*), as in the splendid terracotta head of a centurion recently recovered from Ardea.

Transverse crests are visible on some 4th–2nd century BC Etruscan urns from Volterra, mainly fitted to Apulo-Corinthian helmets. That seems to have been a common helmet type for centurions of the Punic Wars, though small bronze statuettes representing officers with transverse crests also attest to the use of others of Pilos typology in that period. A very interesting depiction of a Boeotian helmet fitted with a *crista transversa* (see page 13) is visible in the centurions' panoplies sculpted on the Sulla monument from the area of the theatre of Marcellus or the Forum, dated to 91 BC.

For the Caesarian period, a monument from Aquileia shows helmets of Agen-Port typology fitted with transverse crests. The panoplies on the monument probably honour centurions of Caesar's Legiones VII, VIII and IX, which were in that city in about 58 BC (*BG*, 10). However, other Caesarian and Late Consular monuments also give us a possible alternative to the transverse crest. They are evidence for the use by centurions of helmets of Coolus-Mannheim and Coolus-Hagenau typology, besides helmets of Hellenic derivation, and they show impressively high 'fore-and-aft' plumes. The centurion on the monument at Saint-Remy (see page 18) wears such a crest, and a perfect parallel is provided by the crest of a centurion carved on a late 1st century BC/early 1st century AD funerary stele from Migliadino San Fidenzio and preserved in the Este Museum. Monuments also suggest that centurions' plumes included the feathers of exotic birds such as the ostrich and peacock; this detail is clearly visible on the helmet of Attic typology sculpted on the funerary monument of a *primus pilus* of the Titecii family, preserved at Trasacco. A single elaborate sample of a transverse crest coloured red is visible on a possible centurion painted in the Esquiline frescoes.

Shields

Shields are depicted in the hands of centurions in literary and iconographic sources. Round hoplite shields are represented on the 3rd–2nd century BC Romano-Etruscan cinerary urns showing fighting centurions. In Caesar's time the half-cylindrical or rectangular *scutum*, as well as the round *clipeus* furnished with an *umbo* boss (*Phars.*, VI, 192), is the main defensive weapon of centurions like Pullo, Vorenus and Scaeva.

Body and leg armour

In the Age of the Kings and the early Republican period the armours of centurions were mainly those familiar from Greek sources: the belly-shaped cuirass of Argos typology, the linen *linothorax*, or the bronze 'muscle' cuirass (*thorax stadios*) – i.e. resembling a naked torso – the latter sometimes also appearing in a hardened leather version. This information is derived from the Praeneste ceramic relief, from terracotta figures of warriors from Latin and Etruscan temples, and from Etrusco-Roman urns. These urns also provide evidence for the use of a leather *lorica* of Italo-Greek type, protected on the breast by an additional bronze plate; this had an embossed design recalling the Villanovan era, and may be compared to the *kardiophylax* named by Polybius (VI ; 23.14). The plate's dimensions of a span each side (23cm/9in) are close, though the Greek author does not clearly describe its square shape, so other round or muscled types might have been used. Polybius seems not to mention a matching back plate.

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Artistic depictions from the middle Consular period attest to the employment by centurions of waist-length Hellenic *thorakes* (*loricae*), fitted with *humeralia* (shoulder guards) and various ranges of hanging strips (*pteryges*). The *humeralia* were attached at the back, from which a neck protector also emerged, and fastened in front. A painting from the Scipionii tomb shows the faded image of a centurion wearing such an armour with a double range of hanging strips, in red and white colour, probably made of linen. The cuirass was constructed in two halves fastened on the left side, as shown by contemporary specimens from Greece.

In the last century of the Republic the metallic 'muscle' cuirass, together with breastplates of Macedonian shape, were probably widely employed only by those of officer rank. Simplified models of 'muscle' armours are visible on the figurative monuments of the 1st century BC worn by officers and centurions. Iron armours, like those used by Macedonian officers, are represented in small Roman statuettes of officers wearing helmets with the *crista transversa*, and so probably centurions, and on the Sulla monument on the Campidoglio. In the latter case elaborate armours are associated with a Boeotian helmet with a transverse crest, so representing the whole panoply of a centurion; the lower part shows attached *pteryges* for the protection of the belly and groin.

In the Caesarian reliefs from Aquileia a centurion's panoply, probably in leather (*corium*), is represented as furnished with short sleeves, shoulder guards, and a small protective collar. This version of the classical *linothorax* seems be worn over a second padded protection, perhaps in linen, and fitted with *pteryges*; similar armours are also shown in reliefs from Narbonne. This arrangement of two superimposed armours (one in fabric and one in leather) echoes the description of the heroic Caesarian centurion Caesius Scaeva when on campaign in Britain: even though 'burdened by the weight of two *loricae*', Scaeva saved himself when he jumped into the sea in full equipment (Val. Max., III, 2, 23).

Dating from the early Augustan period, about 30 BC, a frieze from a funerary monument preserved inside the church of St Domenico in Sora represents an officer's panoply. It features a padded fabric armour, the front showing eight strips of material on the upper body, divided from the lower row by a belt; at the bottom hang strips presumably of the same material, protecting the legs like true *pteryges* (compare with Plate H2). Another frieze from the outside of the church shows a possible representation of a Coolus helmet, a round shield, and a greave, perhaps indicative of the rank of centurion. A recent work by Prof Alessandra Tanzilli has explained that most of the funerary monuments in this area were commissioned by ex-servicemen settled in the colonies of central Italy after the battle of Philippi, especially those of a Legio IV that was disbanded after the civil wars. (Author's photo, courtesy Prof Alessandra Tanzilli)

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The St Domenico carvings at Sora include a single greave – probably worn on the left leg in the old Samnite fashion – and a side view of a decorated helmet of Coolus typology. Other carvings from the pilasters of the church appear to depict a pair of greaves, a scabbarded *gladius*, a rectangular shield and *pilum* javelin, and armour with *pteryges*. (Author's photo, courtesy Prof Alessandra Tanzilli)

A peculiar feature of some of the original Etrusco-Roman urns is the absence of greaves (*ocreae*). By contrast, they are well represented on monuments of the 1st century BC: the Bocchus triumphal sculpture from the area of the theatre of Marcellus, the monuments from Sora, the Aquileia reliefs, and those from Narbonne. From the monumental evidence, it is at the end of the 1st century BC that the conventional association of greaves with the rank of centurion begins.

CLOTHING AND DISTINCTIONS

Clothing

The dress of centurions was usually that worn by their fellow citizen-soldiers, but we have some descriptions of more elaborate clothing. Silius Italicus (XVI) describes a centurion wearing a tunic with gold embroidery (*aurata vestis*). For officers the colour of the tunics could be off-white (*albus*), but also red or pink-red. A possible centurion represented on the fresco fragments from the Statilii tombs on the Esquiline wears an off-white tunic, which fits well with the descriptions of centurions of the early Empire; however, a second possible centurion in the same cycle of frescoes shows a tunic of crimson-red colour.

An exceptional painting recently discovered near Stabiae shows a military officer, perhaps a centurion, engaged with his men in a ferocious fight against a wild boar. He wears a sleeveless pink-red *tunica*, identical in shape to that on the Minucius Lorarius stele. Quintilianus (*Inst. Orat.*, XI, 138) notes that when a tunic was worn above the knee it was the dress of a centurion, and this conforms with the figure of Minucius.

Like all the other *milites*, the centurions were called *praetextati*, i.e. having the right to wear the *toga praetexta* with the purple-red border, the sign of an honourable man. Pliny the Elder (*HN*, XXII, 6, 11) remembers that Petreius, a centurion who distinguished himself in the war against the

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Cimbri, was allowed the honour of performing a sacrifice while wearing the *toga praetexta*: in addition to the award of the *corona obsidionalis* (see below), Petreius, 'clad in the *prætexta*, offered sacrifice at the altar, to the sound of the pipe, in the presence of the then-consuls Marius and Catulus'.

Livy wrote that centurions of the Early Consular period wore the enlisted men's *sagulum* rectangular cloak only during night patrols. In the above-mentioned painting from Stabiae the officer is wearing a green *sagulum* edged with yellow. In the age of Caesar such *sagula* are represented fastened at the centre of the breast with *fibulae* of Aucissa typology, a kind of *fibula* which began to be widespread in the Roman army after the Gallic Wars. This type of fastening brooch, with its typical spherical cap and its knobbed arch, is perfectly visible on the Minucius monument.

The shoes on the Minucius stele are plain closed *calcei*, probably furnished with an extra reinforcement at the front, as seems to be the case on a specimen of *caliga* fitted with a closed *pero* found in the Comacchio ship. (Such details might obviously have been added to the stele in paint, as suggested by Bishop & Coulston.)

A padded cuirass carved on the Arc d'Orange in southern France, dated to either *c.*29 BC or AD 21. It is represented among a trophy of shields, so might have been worn either by a Celtic warrior equipped with Roman armour, or by some officer of the legions of Marcus Antonius and Cleopatra. (Author's photo)

The centurion's vine-staff

According to Silius Italicus (V, 1; VI, 43; XII, 465) and other authors (e.g. Pliny, *NH*, XIV, 19; Lucanus, VI, 146), in addition to his spear the centurion carried the vine-staff (*vitis*). This most famous symbol of centurial rank may have been descended from the Etruscan *lituus*, and is attested in the hands of centurions at least since the Punic Wars. This is confirmed by the literary sources (e.g. *Punica*, XII, 465: 'Centenius, who had once carried

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the vine-staff of a Roman centurion…'), and by the frescoes of the Scipionii tomb. This staff (or cudgel) of command was cut from a vine-branch, about 0.9m (3ft) in length; it was sometimes straight, and sometimes slightly curved at the top. Monuments sometimes show it as fairly featureless, sometimes as twisted and knotty, or of a sinuous shape – like that visible in the stele of Minucius.

A rod (*virga*) was recognized, in general, as a symbol of command or authority, as in the hands of such figures as the *lictores*, and monuments show a similarity between the *vitis* and the *virga* in their shape and the way they were held. The lictor's rod was also called a *vindicta*, a word that could mean 'punishment', and it was with his *vitis* that the centurion enforced his authority over his *milites*. It was often used to inflict corporal punishment on soldiers who were Roman citizens; oddly, it was a matter of honour for them to be punished only with a staff made of this wood and no other, unlike non-Roman soldiers (*extranei*). In this connection Pliny the Elder (*HN*, XIV, III, 19) writes that 'the vine has been introduced into the camp and placed in the centurion's hand for the preservation of supreme authority and command … and … even in chastisement for faults it tends to reflect honour upon the punishment'. Similarly, Livy (Epit. LVII) quotes the strict discipline enforced by Publius Scipio Aemilianus at the siege of Numantia: 'When a soldier was seen out of the ranks, he had him beaten with vine-staffs (*vitibus*) if he was a Roman, or with rods (*virgis*) if he was a foreigner'.

A photo of the Arc d'Orange armour taken in 1902, before a hundred years of air pollution damaged the surfaces. The padded corselet is clearly stitched in a rhomboidal pattern, with short hanging *pteryges*. Close examination shows that it opened down the full length of both sides, and was presumably fastened by cord laces or thongs. (ex-Esperandieu)

In his account of the battle of Pharsalus, Lucanus (*Phars.*, VI, 146) mentions that the centurion Scaeva, hero of Dyrrachium, had been promoted to the honour of bearing the *latia vitis* thanks to his bravery and the blood he had spilt in the Gallic Wars: 'This heroic soldier served long in the fight waged against the savages on the banks of the Rhone; now made centurion, through deeds of blood, he bore the Latin staff before the marshalled line'.

Military decorations

Almost every centurion would have been marked out by military decorations (*dona militaria*), since proven bravery was the main requirement for promotion to this rank. The *corona aurea* (Golden Crown) was awarded to centurions of high rank. However, Pliny the Elder remembered (*HN*, XXII, 11) that before his lifetime the most honoured of all the wreaths, the Grass Crown (*corona graminea*, better known as the *corona obsidionalis*) had been conferred only on the legendary L. Siccius Dentatus, and the centurion Gnaeus Petreius Atinas during the Cimbric War. The latter, while serving as a *primipilus* under the consul Catulus, on finding all retreat for his legion cut off by the enemy, harangued the troops and – after slaying his tribune, who hesitated to cut a way through the encampment of the enemy – brought away the legion in safety. For this

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The monument of the Titecii at Trasacco, on a site where the church of St Cesidius was later built, recorded the military deeds of at least three generations of that family, but only a few fragments survived to be incorporated in the church. Amongst them are various images that may be pertinent to a *centurio primipilus* who served under Caesar and Octavian in the Gallic and civil wars. Under close examination this section reveals an animal head and pelt such as were worn over helmets, the hilt of a dagger, an embossed *clipeus*, and oval and round shields decorated with apparently Celtic/Germanic patterns. (*in situ*, Oratorio di San Cesidio, Trasacco; author's photo, courtesy Don Francesco Grassi)

exploit he received the Grass Crown, which was awarded for relieving a besieged or surrounded force; the wreath was supposed to be gathered and woven from green grass on the site of such a rescue.

Other military awards usually presented to soldiers for acts of bravery were: the Civic Crown (*corona civica*) of oakleaves, for saving the life of a fellow-citizen in battle; the Mural Crown (*corona muralis*), for being the first man to gain the wall of an enemy fortress; decorated medallions (*phalerae*); ceremonial spears (*dorata*); heavy necklaces (*torques*), and bracelets (*armillae*). The perhaps mythical L. Siccius Dentatus, in the mid 5th century BC, was said to have amassed during his career 18 ceremonial spears, 25 *phalerae*, 83 *torques*, 160 gold *armillae*, 14 Civic Crowns, eight Gold Crowns, three Mural Crowns and one Grass Crown; he was also presented with a basketful of coins, ten prisoner slaves and 20 oxen (Dion. Hal., *Rom.*, X, 8, 12; Pliny the Elder, *HN*, XXII, 5; Aul. Gell., *Noct. Att.*, II, 11). Writing under the early Empire, Valerius Maximus (III, 2, 24) declares that Dentatus' decorations were enough for a complete legion (*ornamenta etiam legioni*). Moreover, he received the honour of celebrating on nine occasions the triumphs awarded to his victorious *imperatores*. The presence of his soldiers at a general's triumph was usual, but this passage of Aulus Gellius should be interpreted as meaning that this centurion was given a place of honour in the ceremony, and Valerius Maximus states that nine times Dentatus followed the triumphal chariot of a victorious general. While some of the military decorations listed for Dentatus are considered anachronistic by modern historians, they all had Italic and especially Etruscan precursors, so it is not easy to dismiss the hypothesis that they belonged to the period in which he lived.

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In 293 BC the consul P. Cursor presented golden armlets and crowns to the legate Spurius Nautius, his nephew Spurius Papirius, four centurions, and a maniple of *hastati* for the conquest of Aquilonia and Cominium (Livy, X, 44). The above-mentioned Caesius Scaeva received decorations for his bravery at the battle of Dyrrachium, as did the commander of the redoubt he defended, who – like Scaeva – lost an eye in this engagement: 'Caesar honoured them both with many military gifts' (Appian, *Civil Wars*, II, 60). A very interesting set of *phalerae* displayed by a centurion of the Caesarian period is visible on a stele from Narbonne, the decorated discs being worn on a harness positioned over the chest.

The award and wearing of such *dona militaria* placed even higher expectations of future conduct on centurions, even in the face of certain death, and they represented prized spoils of war for an enemy. For instance, a passage on the Munda campaign of 45 BC during the civil war (*BH*, XXIII) relates that 'two centurions of the Fifth Legion crossed the river… both displaying exceptional bravery against many [foes, until] one of them fell, overwhelmed by the multitude of darts discharged from above. The other continued fighting for some time, until, seeing himself in danger of being surrounded, he endeavoured to make good his retreat, but stumbled and fell. His death becoming known, the enemy crowded together in still greater numbers to strip him of his decorations'.

On the stele of Minucius Lorarius of the Legio Martia in Padua, two holes flanking the sculpted head show where a metallic wreath was originally fitted, probably echoing the original awarded to this centurion for his bravery in the battle of Mutina (Modena). Appian (*Civil Wars*, III, 74) remembers that Cicero 'confirmed again, to the two legions that had deserted from Antony, the 5,000 drachmas per man previously promised to them as the reward of victory, as though they had already conquered, and gave them the perpetual right to wear the olive crown at public festivals'.

Finally – as Shakespeare wrote in his *Coriolanus* – a man's battle-scars were themselves recognized tokens of military pride. These proofs of valour were much flaunted, and displayed to elicit support. When Catalina's centurions and *evocati* died to the last man at the battle of Pistoia in 62 BC, the fact that all their wounds were on the front of their bodies clearly impressed their enemies.

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(note: LCL = Loeb Classical Library, HUP = Harvard University Press)

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PLATE COMMENTARIES

A: THE AGE OF THE KINGS

A1: Roman officer of Second Class levy, 6th century BC

Based on a terracotta figurine from the Roman sanctuary at Veii. The oval shield would rule out its attribution to the First Class of the Servian system of Roman citizen levies, who had the round bronze hoplite shield. The Second Class had a spear, sword, helmet, shield, and greaves, but no cuirass; since a belly-shaped cuirass is depicted on the statuette, this might represent an officer, perhaps a centurion. Note the masked helmet representing a Silenus, once preserved in the San Marino Museum; we give it a *crista transversa* of eagle feathers coloured white and red, by analogy with the temple *antefissa* from Caere showing a very similar helmet. (Note: all figures on these plates represent 'battle order' unless otherwise specified.)

A2: Etrusco-Tarquinian officer, ceremonial order, with *lituus*

This priest-officer is copied from the fragments of a temple *sima* from Praeneste, now preserved in Palestrina Museum, representing a procession of Servian hoplites and chariots. His aspect is typically Etruscan; his single-edged *machaira*, made from a single piece of iron, comes from the same locality. Note his sacral staff or *lituus* in bronze; a wooden version was probably the ancestor of the centurion's *vitis latina*.

A3: Latin centurion, 5th century BC

Recent excavations on the site of Ardea in Latium have recovered an extraordinary ceramic head of a warrior, with a helmet of Chalcidian type furnished with a white transverse crest edged with red. Note the extra plumes on the front part of the helmet, matching two holes visible in the ceramic head. The painted decoration has been restored by analogy with the original colours from contemporary Greek painted sculptures. The body, protected by a lavishly decorated white *linothorax*, is taken from that of a warrior statuette from Segni (490 BC). Note the use of a single sturdy boot (*pero*) in the fashion of the Hernici (attested by Virgil, VII, 689); this was still seen among peasants during the Empire (Pliny the Elder, *HN*, XIV, 26).

B: EXPANSION IN ITALY, 4th–3rd CENTURIES BC

B1: Etruscan centurion, Volterra, 4th century BC

During their wars against the Romans for supremacy over central Italy the Etruscans also had in their army officers with the rank of centurion. This man is copied from a funerary slab from Volterra, which represents the sacrifice of Roman prisoners, as described by Livy (VII, 15, 10). The warrior (*cat*) is protected by a coloured quilted armour, reconstructed from the slab and from a funerary urn from the same area. His main offensive weapon is the formidable *machaira* single-edged sword of Greek type, worn from a baldric in a leather-covered wooden scabbard, here copied from the specimen found in the tomb of the Cai Cutu at Perugia.

B2: Etruscan hoplite, Volterra, c.298 BC

Note the corselet (*spolas*) in decorated and worked leather painted in vivid colours. This armour was more difficult to manufacture and probably less comfortable than a linen cuirass, but is nevertheless widely represented on the Etruscan urns. Note also the *hasta* spear fitted with a leather *amentum* – this is not simply for grip, but could be unwound and used as a throwing-thong.

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B3: Roman *princeps*, *c*.290 BC

Under the new manipular organization, the *principes* formed the second line (*secunda acies*) of the battle array, divided into 15 maniples composed of seasoned soldiers. They were equipped with the *scutum* shield and the finest armours, a sword, and a special type of javelin or *pilum*. Note the Negau helmet, attested for the Romans by a Campanian tomb-painting representing the battle of the Caudine Forks; and the red-dyed tunic (*sarakai* or *globae*) made of goatskin, mentioned for early Roman soldiers by Lydus (*De Magistratibus*, I, 12).

B4: Roman centurion, 4th century BC

From a Volterran urn with an Iliad scene. Note the *crista transversa*, well represented on many Etruscan urns showing Romano-Etruscan officers. The leather *lorica* of Italo-Greek type is also visible on the urn; the heart is protected by a bronze plate, here reconstructed from an archaic specimen found at Tarquinia. Rather unusually, the original urn does not depict greaves on his legs.

C: THE SARDINIAN REVOLT, 215 BC

C1 & C2: Combat between the centurion Ennius, and Hostus, son of Hampsagoras

In his *Punica* (XII, 401ff), Silius Italicus describes the duel between the poet Ennius, at that time a centurion in the Roman army, and Hostus, son of the rebel Hampsagoras, leader of the Sardo-Punic aristocracy in Sardinia: 'Ennius had made himself conspicuous by slaying many of the enemy, and his ardour in battle grew with the number of his victims. Now, hoping to win everlasting fame by disposing of such a dangerous foe, Hostus flew at Ennius and hurled his spear strongly.' The appearance of Ennius is reconstructed partly from the fragmentary painting on the Scipionii tomb on the Via Appia, representing a centurion. His painted leather *lorica* is based upon a ceramic statue of Mars from a temple in the Area Sacra of Sant'Omobono, Rome. The Sardo-Punic aristocracy was strongly influenced – like that of Carthage – by Hellenistic fashions in armament. Note also the device on Hostus' shield, copied from a coin minted by the Sardinian rebels in 215 BC; this chiselled bull – sacred symbol of Sardinia since ancient times – probably had a connection with totemic fertility symbols.

Background: The army of Hampsagoras was composed not only of Carthaginian regular troops and Spaniards, but also of ferocious Sardo-Pellitian warriors, dressed in their peculiar national garment, the *mastruca* (Ael., *DNA*, XVI, 34).

D: THE SECOND PUNIC WAR, 3rd–2nd CENTURIES BC

D1: Carthaginian officer of the Sacred Band

The equipment of this captured Carthaginian officer in the aftermath of Scipio's victory at Zama, 202 BC, is reconstructed from a seal-ring, and from a statue of the god Herakles-Melqart. Officers in the Carthaginian army often wore a lionskin as a rank distinction, in honour of the god Melqart, identified with the Greek Herakles. Note the Macedonian helmet worn under the lion's mask, copied from that of the Lyson and Kallikles grave, whose typology is well represented on Carthaginian coins of 215 BC. The eye

Etruscan masked helmet representing the stylized face of a Silenus; it was once kept in the San Marino Archaeological Museum, but its current location is unknown. Compare with Plate A1. (Author's collection)

device on his shield is copied from the triumphal monument of Massinissa at Chemtou, representing the trophies of Carthaginian weaponry captured at Zama.

D2: Centurion of the *Socii Piceni*

The Picentes and the Umbri, loyal allies of the Romans in the Second Punic War, used equipment of mixed Etruscan, Celtic and Italiote styles. They were strongly Romanized; many rose to high rank in the Roman army, and Picenian warriors and officers are expressly mentioned by the sources (Silius Italicus, *Punica*, V, 208; VIII, 424–438). Note his *thorakion alusidotos* (mail armour), reconstructed from the fragments found in the Scipionii tomb; his elaborate helmet of southern Italian Attic typology, with the *equina crista* (horse-hair crest) mentioned for Picenian officers; and the shining greaves, from finds in Picenian territory. The use of the battle-axe rather than a *vitis* as a rank symbol may have been a peculiarity of the Picenian *socii*.

D3: Etruscan centurion

A large number of Etruscan warriors served in Scipio's army at the battle of Zama. The centurion depicted here is copied from a Greek hero, reconstructed with the weaponry of an Etrusco-Roman officer from an urn now in the Tomba della Pellegrina at Chiusi; this shows a transverse arrangement of the crest. The composite armour is of a type developed in the 3rd century BC, to produce a more flexible type of

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6th-century BC terracotta frieze from Palestrina, representing a Romano-Etruscan officer – possibly a centurion – with a *lituus*; compare with Plate A2. (Praeneste Museum; photo author's collection)

protection than the previous *linothorakes*. This new cuirass was made of quilted linen, with the chest, shoulders and back reinforced with metal scales.

E: MARIUS' TRIUMPH OVER JUGURTHA, 104 BC

E1: Gaius Marius

The scene is reconstructed after the descriptions of the Roman triumph from Appian (*Punic Wars*, 66) and Zonaras (VII, 21). The ritual aspect of the *triumphator* was accentuated by painting his face and body with red *minium* colour, which was also used to decorate the statue of Jupiter Capitolinus, whom the victorious general personified during the ceremony. The *triumphator* wore a double 'crown' – a laurel wreath on his head, and a golden one held above it by a slave. His costume or *vestis triumphalis* comprised the *tunica palmata* and the *toga picta*, dyed purple and embroidered with gold. The quantity of expensive purple dye used showed the degree of luxury of this garment.

E2: Jugurtha, King of Numidia

A former allied commander in P. Cornelius Scipio the Younger's Spanish campaign of 134 BC, Jugurtha became a claimant to the throne of what is roughly modern Algeria. When Rome interfered in his dynastic quarrel he declared war in 112 BC, and gained early success. In 106, Gaius Marius was promoted to the command, and two years later Jugurtha was captured by Marius' subordinate (and future bitter rival) L. Cornelius Sulla. It was not unusual that he should be held captive for a long time before being displayed in Marius' triumph, and again as usual, he was strangled to death after the celebration.

Jugurtha is described by Sallust as an athletic and handsome man (*De Bello Iug*., I, 6). According to Orosius (V, 15), he was paraded with his sons in chains in front of the chariot of the victorious *imperator*, dressed in royal dress, having a gold earring to the right lobe according to the African custom (Plut., *Mar*., XVII). The Numidian royal diadem, described by Silius Italicus (*Punica*, XVI, 241–242), featured a band of precious white cloth (*albens vitta*), here worn under a laurel crown visible on the king's coins.

E3: Centurion

The armour is copied from the frieze of the Bocchus monument from the Campidoglio in Rome. The simpler palm motifs on the *humeralia* shoulder guards of his cuirass may be a mark of rank. This kind of *lorica* – a *thorax stadion* or *statos* in bronze or iron, as shown by the colours on the Esquiline frescos – probably had the *pteryges* sewn directly to a lining rather than as part of an under-armour garment. The shield carried by the centurion is of a peculiar quadrangular shape, and bears the figure of a winged serpent or dragon.

Head of a Latin warrior with a *crista transversa*, thus probably a centurion, dating from the beginning of the 5th century BC; it was found in Ardea at Temple B of the 'Le Salzare' archaeological site. Note the red edge to the crest, and the two holes on the front for insertion of extra plumes, now missing. Compare with Plate A3. (Reproduction by Giuseppe Rava from the original)

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Unusual quadrangular shield, from the Campidoglio monument. Note the blazon in the form of a winged serpent or dragon; this may be a Numidian device, since the frieze was erected by Bocchus of Mauretania to celebrate the victory over Jugurtha. It may even have been copied from an original shield carried by a Roman officer taking part in Marius' triumph – see Plate E3; however, other historians have interpreted it as a Mithridatic device. (Musei Capitolini, Centrale Montemartini, Rome; photo author's collection)

A detail of the Campidoglio monument clearly representing elaborately embossed greaves. It is from the 1st century BC that greaves begin to be associated particularly with monuments representing centurions. This example, like comparable pieces recovered at sites of Imperial date, may have been made of copper alloy with silver-gilt decoration. The pattern represents a lion's mask with crossed paws, surmounting the image of a Winged Victory armed with shield and sword – see Plate E3. (Musei Capitolini, Centrale Montemartini, Rome; photo author's collection)

F: SACRIFICE OF PURIFICATION, 101 BC

This scene is reconstructed from the so-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus, a much-used source that provides valuable and detailed evidence for military equipment at the end of the 2nd century BC.

F1: Centurion Gnaeus Petreius Atinas

According to Pliny the Elder, in 101 BC the *primipilus* Petreius, who had received the *corona obsidionalis* for a valiant deed when serving under Q. Lutatius Catulus in the campaign against the Cimbri in southern France, was honoured by performing a temple sacrifice in the presence of the consuls Marius and Catulus. The altar shows a soldier in *toga praetexta* and *velato capite*, accompanied by a *victimarius* (**F2**) leading a ram to be sacrificed. The Ahenobarbus monument was made at about this date, and since the ceremony represented is a *lustratio*, we cannot entirely exclude the possibility that it represents the episode mentioned by Pliny.

F3: Legionaries

The ringmail body armour worn by these soldiers of Marius' army is reconstructed by comparison of the figures sculpted on the Ahenobarbus monument with fragments of Roman 2nd-century BC mail from Delos and El Soumaa.

F4: *Lictor*

In the frescoes of the Sepolcro Arieti, several *lictores*, represented facing left, wear a short red military tunic with a central white vertical stripe or *clavus*, gathered by a yellowish belt (*tunica cincta*). The bundle of *fasces* with the axe, representing the state's authority to beat and execute, is carried over the left shoulder, bound with purple straps (*infulae*). In his right hand the *lictor* carries a rod of office called a *commetaculum* or *virga* (Livy, XII, 27, 3).

G: CAESAR'S CENTURIONS, 58–46 BC

G1: Caesius Scaeva

We reconstruct Scaeva, the hero who lost an eye fighting Pompey's troops at Dyrrachium in 48 BC, with the equipment carved on the monument of Saint-Remy representing a fight during Caesar's wars, integrated with details from a monument at Narbonne celebrating the victories of the Caesarians. The Saint-Remy monument and other sculptural evidence from the Late Consular period suggest the use of tall, plumed helmet crests mounted 'fore-and-aft'. We copy Scaeva's decorations from *phalerae* represented on a

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gravestone found at Narbonne. His sword is taken from a *gladius hispaniensis* found in Osuna and dated to *c*.50 BC. Note his round shield (*clipeus*) bearing the *Sidus Julium*, the symbol of the Caesar family.

G2: Veteran centurion of the Gallic Wars

A fresco on the Esquiline shows a fighting officer protected by silvered greaves, and a *thorax stadios* made of bronze; his helmet, of possible Hellenic typology, bears an impressive *crista transversa* of scarlet-red colour. If – as this kind of panoply would suggest – it is a representation of a centurion, then it is the only source known to the author where a red crest may be distinctive of centurial rank. The shield device is copied from the Caesarian shields represented on the monuments at Narbonne, of Augustan date but celebrating Caesar's victories in Gaul. It is fanciful, but attractive, to associate this reconstruction with the renowned Sextius Baculus of Caesar's Legio XII.

G3: Centurion of Legio VII, VIII or IX

Here we reconstruct an officer in winter 58 BC, in battle against the Helvetii. Centurions' panoplies are represented amongst the trophies of arms sculpted on the Aquileia reliefs, made in honour of the Caesarian legions that concentrated there in about 58 BC. The sculptural evidence shows an Agen-Port helmet furnished with a *crista transversa*; what appears to be a leather cuirass with neck and shoulder protection; and greaves, decorated at the knees with a helmeted head above a 'roped' hinge, and fixed with a strap. According to Caesar (*BG*, V, 44), centurions were armed with the *pilum*. This officer also has a dagger positioned on the right side of his military belt (*cingulum*), and a *gladius* supported by a baldric. During the Gallic Wars the Roman soldiers, and even Caesar himself, used the warmer Gallic clothing – '*gallico habitu*' (Suetonius, *Caes*., LVIII). The cut of the tunic visible here at the arms and under the *pteryges* of the leather cuirass is copied from that of the carved 'La Vachère warrior', with turned-back cuffs, and opened at the front hem for ease when riding. Its colour is copied from some fragments of Celtic military clothing found at Masada.

A set of military decorations or *phalerae* arranged on a leather harness. This is from a late 1st-century BC stele found in Narbonne; to the author's knowledge, it is the only set of such decorations represented on a funerary monument related to Caesar's Gallic Wars. It was probably awarded to a centurion, perhaps a *primipilus*; we have chosen to copy it in our reconstruction of Caesius Scaeva – see Plate G1. (ex-Esperandieu)

H: THE LAST CONSULAR CENTURIONS, 44–30 BC

H1: Minucius T.F. Lorarius, Legio III Martia

Copied from his stele, dated 40–30 BC, this officer wears a *tunica* that follows a description by Quintilianus, of off-white colour as shown on the Esquiline frescoes. The olive crown is reconstructed from fitting-holes on the stele; this wreath was awarded to his unit for the victory of Mutina on 21 April, 43 BC; Minucius may or may not have been killed a week earlier at Forum Gallorum, or may have died during the fateful crossing of the Adriatic Sea in 42 BC. The wide belt is fitted with a series of thongs for attaching the horizontally-sheathed *pugio* and the *gladius*; the sword's trilobate pommel is similar to that represented on the Late Consular-period gravestone of the military tribune L. Appuleius from Mentana, and to contemporary trophies of arms preserved in the Basilica of Saint Agnes in Rome. Note the heavy ring shown on the left hand in the Minucius stele.

H2: Centurion of a Legio IV

The Coolus-Hagenau helmet is copied from an original 1st-century BC specimen preserved in Naples Museum; found at Pompei, it may have been used as a gladiatorial helmet until AD 79. The felt armour (*coactile*) and the greaves (*ocreae*) are copied from reliefs from a funerary monument preserved in the church of San Domenico in Sora, where many veterans of the civil wars retired after the battles of Philippi and Actium, including those of a disbanded Legio IV. Under the fabric armour the officer wear a pink-red *tunica militaris*. His green cloak (*sagum*) with yellow edging, and his blue closed boots (*cothurni*), are from a hunting fresco recently found at Stabiae, from which we also take the colours of the *scutum*.

H3: Centurion of Cleopatra's bodyguard; Actium, 31 BC

For our reconstruction of this veteran officer in the service of Marcus Antonius, we take the helmet and greaves from the Sola reliefs. The quilted armour of felt and linen is based on the victory trophies of Agrippa carved on the Arc d'Orange. As described by Cassius Dio (L, 4), Cleopatra 'had Roman soldiers in her bodyguard, and all of these inscribed her name upon their shields'. Perhaps it was a scarred old soldier like this who tried to convince Antony to fight on land, and not at sea, before his defeat at Actium?

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Dedication

To my dear sister Angela

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